

DEVELOPING A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR
THE VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION WITHIN
THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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General Studies

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR THE VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, by Shireen N. Lackey, 132 pages.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has expressed its commitment to agency transformation while maintaining its responsibility to provide the highest level of health care and services to Veterans and their dependents. One means of meeting this standard is for VA to place increased focus on current and future leaders, not only by providing more leadership development opportunities but also by providing these opportunities to more employees.

The benefits of a wide-ranging leadership development program are many: employees become more capable, knowledgeable, and equipped to rise to the challenge of providing the highest quality benefits and services. Investing in employees builds their confidence that the organization cares about their personal development. In the long-term, providing leadership development skills assists with the agency's succession planning by building a pool of skilled candidates able to fill future senior leader positions.

Previous research has identified the need for increased leadership development opportunities within VA. This study looks at the development of a program within one of the agency's three administrations, the Veterans Benefits Administration. In suggesting a leadership development program, this study addresses the need and reasons for a program, discusses structure and methodology, makes suggestions for appropriate employees to include in the program, and provides suggested outcomes.

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ACRONYMS

ADDP	Assistant Director Development Program
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine and Reference Publication
ALC	Army Learning Concept
CCC	Captains Career Course
CGSOC	Command and General Staff Officers Course
DLMT	Division Leadership and Management Training
EQ	Emotional Intelligence
FY	Fiscal Year
GS	General Schedule
I CARE	Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IST	Initial Supervisor Training
ITL	Introduction to Leadership
LCP	Leadership Coaching Program
LDP	Leadership Development Program
LDS	Leader Development System
LDSTF	Leader Development System Task Force
LEAD	Leadership Enhancement and Development
NCA	National Cemetery Administration
PMF	Presidential Management Fellows
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps

VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VBA	Veterans Benefits Administration
VHA	Veterans Health Administration

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the second largest federal agency within the United State government, employing over 312,800. Its mission is equally as large, as the agency strives to “fulfill our Nation’s enduring commitment to Veterans” by providing benefits, medical care, and other services to American Veterans and their dependents.¹ This is no easy task. In 2013, there were 6.4 million participants enrolled in VA’s healthcare system, 4.6 million receiving compensation or pension benefits, and over 1 million using VA’s education benefits. These numbers do not include participants using other VA benefits, such as vocational rehabilitation and employment services, home loan guarantees, life insurance, and burial benefits. VA must be prepared to address such a substantial undertaking by ensuring that its employees, especially leaders, are knowledgeable, prepared, and able to meet the demands of their clientele.

The Need for Leadership Development Within VA

Retired General Eric K. Shinseki, the current VA Secretary, has clearly stated his intention to transform the agency into a 21st century organization. To this point, Secretary Shinseki’s letter to the President of the United States, included in the agency’s fiscal year 2013 annual report, expresses VA’s commitment to providing Veterans and

¹Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs, December 2013).

their families with the best health care and services. One means of meeting this high standard is for VA to place focus on its leaders, including current and future leaders, and formal and informal leaders. To do this, VA must understand and value the importance of leadership development and dedicate itself to providing leadership development opportunities for its employees.

In providing leadership development to employees, VA needs to focus both on providing more opportunities for development as well as providing opportunities to more employees. Through leadership development of its employees, VA will build a stronger employee capacity. In the short-term, these employees will become more capable, knowledgeable, and prepared. They will be better equipped to rise to the challenge of providing the best quality of health care and benefits to their country's Veterans. In the long-term, providing leadership development skills will assist the organization with succession planning, as these employees will join a growing pool of skilled candidates that VA will be able to select from when filling senior leader positions.

Leadership Development Within VA—Why Now?

VA is currently in a state of flux, as claims for benefits have continued to increase steadily over the last few years and higher numbers of Veterans and their dependents are seeking healthcare services through VA medical facilities. For example, as depicted in figure 1, from 2012 to 2013, VA experienced a 4.9 percent increase in claims for compensation and pension benefits, an 8.3 percent increase in claims for education benefits, a nine percent increase in vocational rehabilitation and education services, a

16.6 percent increase in guarantees on home loans, and a 1.3 percent increase in those seeking medical services.²

Veterans Served by Department of Veterans Affairs Year-to-Year Comparison from 2012 to 2013 ³			
VA Program	2012 Participants	2013 Participants	Percentage Increase
Compensation & Pension	4,420,235	4,638,828	4.9%
Education	944,200	1,023,000	8.3%
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment	114,281	124,570	9%
Loan Guarantees	539,900	629,300	16.6%
Medical Care	6,333,100	6,418,439	1.3%

Figure 1. Veterans Served by VA, Year-to-Year Comparison from 2012 to 2013

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs, December 2013), I-11.

The rapidly rising demand of Veterans and their dependents seeking VA benefits and services places great strain on the VA structure, especially its employees. They are under pressure to provide an increased quantity of services while maintaining quality. This is no easy feat and the intense pressure can lead to employee burnout. In the face of such adverse conditions, it is important that managers and their employees understand how they affect the mission and fit into the organization's culture. Providing leadership development opportunities is one way to promote and improve the connection between managers, their employees, and the mission. These opportunities help the employees to

²Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report*, I-11.

see that the organization values them, and encourages the employees to stay focused on their development and build their leadership potential. It further demonstrates that the organization is invested in their professional development. It helps them to understand that they make a difference to the organization and that they are a part of the solution, thereby helping them to align their values and goals with those of the organization. This makes them more committed to the organization and the organization's success.

The benefits of providing leadership development are not limited to the interests of the employees. There is also organizational benefit to providing leadership development opportunities to employees. The skills gained through leadership development opportunities make current and future managers more capable, as well as enabling them to do their jobs more efficiently. Learning these skills also builds resiliency in the employees, helping them to deal with the increased workloads and other challenges that they face. A dissertation study completed at the University of Nebraska found that the “development of human, social, and positive psychological capital of managers and employees can better equip them to deal with setbacks, both at the personal and at the organizational levels.”³ Similarly, an article in the *International Journal of Organisational Behavior* found that when organizations and their employees “learn and

³Carolyn M. Youssef, “Resiliency Development of Organizations, Leaders, and Employees: Multi-Level Theory Building and Individual-Level, Path-Analytical Empirical Testing” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, May 2004), 112.

continuously improve their skills and abilities . . . they move beyond simply adapting to new challenges and into the realm of generative learning.”⁴

Additionally, VA can reap benefits by developing potential future leaders. This was recognized in 2012, when VA commissioned the Leadership Development System Task Force (LDSTF),⁵ which clearly indicated a need for future leadership development within the agency. More specifically, leadership development can become one aspect of the organization’s multi-pronged succession planning by looking at its employees from a long-term perspective. By increasing leadership skills in its employees, VA will create a pool of qualified candidates to choose from for future senior leader positions.

History of VA

To better understand this discussion, it is important to understand VA from an organizational context. The nation has provided benefits to its Veterans dating back to its days as a British colony. Veteran services were extended following the Revolutionary War and again following the Civil War. In 1917, following the United States’ involvement in World War I, various new Veteran benefits were established, with oversight provided by three different federal agencies: the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions of the Interior Department, and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer

⁴Peter J. Jordan, “Dealing with Organisational Change: Can Emotional Intelligence Enhance Organisational Learning,” *International Journal of Organizational Behavior* 8, no. 1 (2004): 456-471.

⁵Department of Veterans Affairs, *Leadership Development System Task Force*, Internal Department of Veterans Affairs charter document, signed by John R. Gingrich, Chief of Staff, April 6, 2012.

Soldiers.⁶ In 1930, Congress created the Veterans Administration to coordinate benefits and services for Veterans, with the three existing agencies incorporated as bureaus. In 1989, with the establishment of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the agency became a cabinet-level office. During the almost 60 years in between, VA has witnessed immense growth in healthcare services, and has also assumed control over the nation's national cemeteries.

VA Organizational Structure

The “Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report” provides the current organizational structure within VA (figure 2). It depicts three administrations: the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). Each of these administrations is led by an Under Secretary who reports to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of VA. Additionally, there are seven staff offices at the VA level, each led by an Assistant Secretary reporting to the Secretary: Management; Information and Technology; Policy and Planning; Operations, Security, and Preparedness; Human Resources and Administration; Public and Intergovernmental Affairs; and Congressional and Legislative Affairs. Finally, under the Secretary is the Office of the Secretary, which includes: the Chief of Staff, the General Counsel, the Inspector General; the Board of Veterans' Appeals, and Acquisition-Logistics-and-Construction. The Secretary's Office also includes the Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization; Employment

⁶Department of Veterans Affairs, “About VA,” http://www.va.gov/about_va/vahistory.asp (accessed November 11, 2013).

Discrimination Complaint Adjudication; Center for Women Veterans; Center for Minority Veterans; Advisory Committee Management; Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; Non-Governmental Organizations Gateway Initiative Office; Federal Recovery Coordination Office; Veterans Service Organization Liaison; and Survivors Assistance.⁷

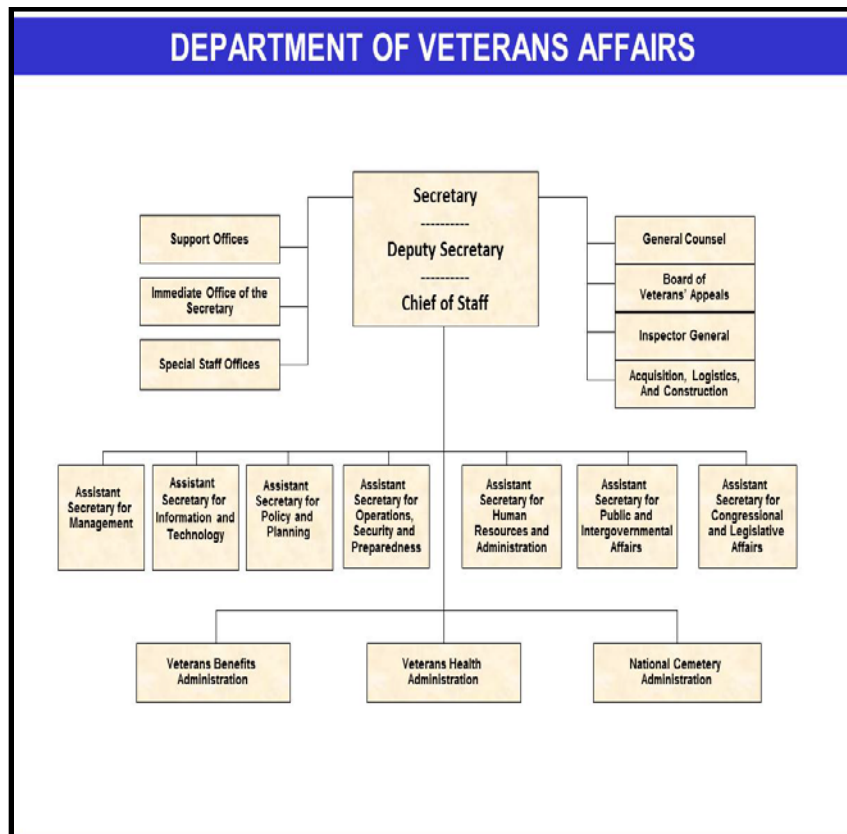


Figure 2. VA Organizational Structure

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, December 2013), I–13.

⁷Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report*, I–13.

Veterans Benefits Administration

The focus of this study, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), is one of the three administrations within VA, and has the mission of “providing benefits and services to Veterans and their families in a responsive, timely, and compassionate manner.”⁸ Of the three administrations, VBA is the second largest in size, falling between the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). When considering VA as a whole, including staff offices and other support offices, VBA only employs approximately 6.8 percent of the organization’s staff, with an employee total of 21,130 out of 312,841 employees VA-wide (as of September 30, 2013).⁹

VBA Budget

However, although VBA has a relatively small percentage of VA’s total personnel, its annual budget is not small. In fact, VBA’s budget in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 was almost \$81 billion of a total VA budget appropriated budget of almost \$150 billion, approximately 54 percent of the total VA budget. However, it should be noted that approximately 98 percent of the obligated funds go directly to Veterans and eligible beneficiaries in the form of benefit payments and direct services.¹⁰ For example, as part

⁸Department of Veterans Affairs, *Annual Benefits Report: Fiscal Year 2012* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs, June 2013), http://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/2012_abr.pdf (accessed January 24, 2014).

⁹Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report*, I–12.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

of VBA's budget, direct payments are made to eligible beneficiaries who are entitled to compensation, pension, premiums on life insurance policies, rehabilitation and readjustment services, guarantees on home loans, and other benefits authorized by the various sections and chapters of the United States Code. The remaining two percent of the budget funds operational expenses including employment of personnel to receive, process, administer, and maintain these noted benefits and services.

VBA Leadership and Personnel

VBA's organizational structure is shown in figure 3. VBA is led by the Under Secretary for Benefits who is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, as dictated by United States Code.¹¹ The Under Secretary is supported by a Principal Deputy Under Secretary, a Chief of Staff, and three Deputy Under Secretaries. The current Under Secretary for Benefits is Retired Brigadier General Allison A. Hickey, who assumed responsibility on June 6, 2011.

¹¹Cornell University Law School, "38 US Code Section 306—Under Secretary for Benefits," <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/38/306> (accessed February 9, 2014).

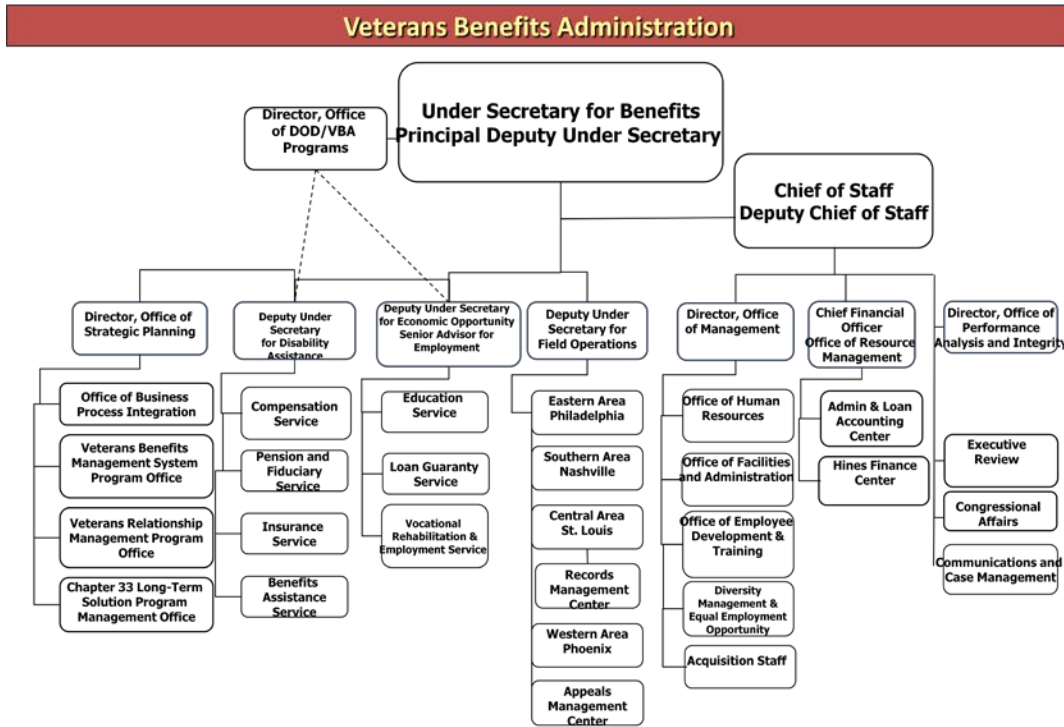


Figure 3. VBA Organizational Structure

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, “Organization,” <http://vbaw.vba.gov/usb/VBAOrgChart.ppt>. (accessed February 10, 2014).

The three Deputy Under Secretaries who report to the Under Secretary of Benefits are responsible for business lines that fall into three distinct benefit categories: those related to Disability Assistance, those related to Economic Opportunity, and those related to Field Operations. Additionally, five program offices report directly to the Under Secretary: the Office of Strategic Planning, the Office of Management, the Office of Resource Management, the Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity, and the Office of Department of Defense / Veterans Benefits Administration Programs. VBA employees are responsible for administering all of VBA’s entitlement programs and services, which include compensation, pension, vocational rehabilitation and employment, insurance,

education, loan guaranty, outreach, and Servicemember transition services. Many employees process claims, while others provide outreach and counseling services, work to support the missions of the administration's program offices, or cooperate within VA to support the Office of the Secretary, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the General Counsel, the VA health care system, or the VA cemeteries. Senior level VBA leaders interact with Congress, as well as other federal government agencies, community stakeholders, and associated VA partners.

As previously shown in figure 1, from 2012 to 2013 almost all of the benefits administered and paid by VBA experienced an increase in entitled participants, with increases ranging from 4.9 percent all the way to 16.6 percent, in benefits including compensation and pension, education, vocational rehabilitation, and loan guarantees. In fact, the only VBA benefit that did not experience an increase in participants was insurance, which decreased 2.7 percent.¹² An increase in participants implies an increase in claims received, as every new entitled participant will at least have an initial claim for benefits or services. Additionally, some participants will file for increases, maintenance changes, or other claim-related requests.

This is important to understand because from FY2012 to FY2013, despite the increases in workload, the total number of full-time employees increased by only 809 personnel across all VBA offices; an increase of less than four percent. Therefore, the increased number of claims received by VBA was processed by roughly the same number of employees as the year before. Logically, an increased workload coupled with the

¹²Department of Veterans Affairs, *Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2013 Performance and Accountability Report*, I-12.

pressures to process claims quickly has the potential of sacrificing quality or accuracy. Contributing to the impending problem, part of the agency's transformation plan includes a goal of processing claims for disability benefits within 125 days of receipt with an accuracy of 98 percent by the end of FY2015. Further goals for the current year include increasing the accuracy rate on pension maintenance cases while decreasing the number of days it takes to complete them, decreasing the pending inventory of pension cases, decreasing the number of days to complete original and supplemental education claims, increasing the rate of rehabilitation and the rate of employment for Veterans receiving vocational rehabilitation and employment services, and increasing the default resolution rate for loans on VA-guaranteed homes. These goals will continue to strain frontline employees and managers at multiple levels of leadership, varying from direct supervisors to Regional Office Directors to VBA headquarter staff, as they monitor progress towards achievements of these goals.

VBA monitors its goals and personnel through headquarters located at VA Central Office in Washington, District of Columbia. However, the majority of its employees and offices are spread throughout the United States over 56 regional offices. There is at least one regional office in every state, one in Puerto Rico, and one in the Philippines. Regional offices provide the setting for most employees as they process claims and provide services for all of the identified VBA benefits.

As an organization, VA works hard to remain accessible to its core clients: its Veterans and their dependents. This is no easy task, considering the nation's Veterans come from diverse locations, rural and urban. VBA is no exception, and understands that

a Veteran might have to traverse quite a distance to reach its state's one benefits office. Therefore, VBA employees are decentralized throughout the country at a myriad of small, out-based offices. The employees are situated within local communities, at institutions of higher learning, or within VHA Medical Centers and Community-Based Outpatient Centers. These out-based employees are unique in that they provide specific, directed, and usually very limited services. For example, they may provide Veterans attending college with assistance associated with the Vet Success on Campus program, they may provide Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment counseling, or they may provide Transition Assistance Program briefings and military separation services. These employees may be the only VBA presence at their location, or may be stationed with other VBA employees, according to the needs of the area. Out-based employees are also located outside the United States in countries that have a predominant United States Veteran population: Guam, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy.

There are inherent challenges for the administration associated with having their employees spread across so many locations. Challenges include ensuring consistent communication, avoiding miscommunication inherent with the lack of face-to-face contact, the potential duplication of efforts across offices, and the ability to maintain an administration-wide identity and synergy. While all of these are crucial, for the purposes of this study, the biggest challenge for such an expansive organization is the ability to provide consistent and equal opportunities for all employees, particularly when it comes to training and developmental opportunities.

Employee Promotion within VBA

Typically, when an employee begins employment with VBA, their promotion potential is determined by the position. Although some positions include a multi-level general schedule (GS) plan (i.e. a position that starts as a GS-9 and maxes at a GS-10), all positions have a maximum GS level that can be attained. Once that GS level has been reached, the employee will remain in that position and at the same GS level. Rotations to other assignments or details to other offices, though common and even encouraged at other federal government agencies, are generally very limited. If an employee does want to seek a promotion or a change in position (even one at the same GS level), they must file an application and compete for the new position.

Because of this process, most VBA employees in management positions have worked their way to leadership positions from a lower level of employment. Managerial responsibilities typically come with attainment of the GS-12 level, although not all GS-12 positions include management responsibilities. Additionally, managerial responsibilities may accompany lower grade assignments, as long as the position description includes this role as one of the specified duties.

VBA Goals and Key Programs

Location-based concerns and limited promotion opportunities for employees are not the only challenges that VBA currently faces. Indeed, as a highly visible federal agency, VA has faced significant public, media, and Congressional dissent in recent years. Perceived inability to meet the agency's core mission of providing benefits and services to Veterans and eligible beneficiaries in a timely and efficient manner has led to

an outpouring of criticism and commentary. To speak to these challenges, VA's annual report in 2013 identified three agency priority goals which it felt represented the highest priorities: Veteran homelessness, "VBA access" to allow improved awareness of available VA services and benefits, and the backlog of benefits claims pending within VBA for unacceptable periods of time. Veteran homelessness refers to the Department's initiative to eliminate homelessness in Veterans by 2015. VBA access refers to improved Veteran awareness of the various VA benefits and services available, particularly through outreach and online methodologies. VBA's backlog refers to the reduction of the pending inventory of compensation and pension claims through processes to reduce claim completion time.

While all three of these priorities impact VBA, the second two--increased access and decreased backlog--directly relate to services provided by VBA. To meet the pressure of addressing these priorities, VBA formulated a transformation plan comprised of multiple synchronized initiatives and integrated processes. For example, they are working to decrease the backlog through the use of a paperless system and the gradual transition from a paper environment to a digital one. Also to address the backlog, VBA reorganized the structure for its regional office staff into segmented lanes where each lane processes specific types of claim for which employees within that lane possess expertise. To address access goals, VBA embraced the use of social media to connect with Veterans, and enhanced self-service access to benefits through the online portal VA Application Online and the website www.eBenefits.com.

Going beyond the three priority goals, VA further highlighted 111 programs for measured improvement. Of these 111 programs, 25 were identified as “key” to the agency’s success. Of the 111 measured programs, VBA owns 37; of the 25 identified as “key”, VBA owns 13. In other words, although VBA owns only 33 percent of the measured programs, it owns an overwhelmingly significant 52 percent of the designated-key programs. Most of these programs have measured goals that must be achieved through increased accuracy rates or decreased pending inventories. Additional program goals include increasing client satisfaction, increasing claims completed per full-time employee, and others. Most of the tracked VBA programs have experienced improvement, but still have further to go, as evidenced by continued harsh public criticism. Though VBA continues to devote time, effort, money, and people into meeting these goals, it is hard to ignore the impact that the harsh criticism and continued pressure has on VBA’s employees.

However, to avoid accentuating only the negative, VBA has also experienced significant successes. One of these is the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). VBMS is one of VBA’s current initiatives to transform itself into a 21st century organization, using technology to improve the delivery of service. Part of this system includes a process to work benefit claims through a paperless environment. Other noted improvements include the expansion and improvement of the Post 9/11 GI Bill Program, the expansion of the VetSuccess on Campus Program, progress in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System shared with the Department of Defense, and maintenance of the lowest foreclosure rates in the mortgage industry.

Concluding VBA's State of Affairs

VA is a very large department both in personnel and budget, and arguably has one of the most important and honorable missions of all of the federal government agencies. Within VA, VBA is a small component, comprising only 6.8 percent of its total employees. Yet, VBA carries fiscal responsibility for 54 percent of the agency's budget and ownership of two out of three of the department's priority goals. This puts excessive strain on VBA's most important resource – its employees.

As VBA works to better understand its operational environment, including its employees and associated challenges, and continues to focus on attaining and surpassing its goals, a logical initiative to pursue is the introduction of a leadership development program. This program would improve the capabilities of the VBA workforce, as investment in leadership development provides the administration with the opportunity to improve the capacity of both formal and informal leaders. Such a program could assist employees in developing essential skills such as team-building, ethics, and integrity, which improve not only themselves but also the organizational culture. Additionally, since leadership development focuses on organizational value through networked relationships, a leadership development program would serve to link individuals to each other and to the organization. This enhances the organization's long-term prosperity based on employees who can more effectively lead the organization into the future.

Finally, the time is right to pursue an undertaking such as a leadership development program within VBA. The current VA Secretary has a clear vision to transform the agency into a 21st century organization and embraces techniques available to help change the culture towards that vision. This research addresses the potential

benefits and challenges of such a program; the following questions are intended to guide this effort. Effectively addressing these questions could provide insights to the efficacy of a leadership development program while also building the foundation for future research.

Primary Research Question

Should VBA develop a leadership development program?

Secondary Research Questions

What is the desired outcome of a leadership development program for VBA?

How should the program be structured?

What should be the preferred methodology?

What are the general education and training components (i.e. curriculum) that should be included in the program?

Are there successful formats or curriculums already in existence that can be used as models?

At what point in an employee's career should they be considered for this program?

How should employees be identified for the opportunity to participate?

What challenges must be overcome to gain support from candidates' supervisors and offices?

Assumptions

Based on the findings and initial recommendations made by the Leadership Development System Task Force, it is assumed that there is a need for leadership development within VA.

Definitions

Leader Development: “Leader development focuses on the development of the individual or human capital with an emphasis on cultivating desired attributes in a leader in terms of behaving, thinking, or feeling.”¹³ “Leader development emphasizes individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles”¹⁴

Leadership Development: Building networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organization value; social capital is the developmental target. The focus is greater than the individual, it is relational, connecting the individual and the organization.

Limitations

The first limitation is that the leadership development program addressed in this study will be specific to VBA and may not apply to the other VA administrations, staff

¹³Manfred Kets de Vries and Konstantin Korotov, “Developing Leaders and Leadership Development” (Research working paper, Insead Business School for the World, 2010), 8.

¹⁴David V. Day, “Leadership Development: A Review in Context,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (2000): 581-613.

offices, or program offices. However, some of the recommendations made in this study may be applicable to the other administrations and program offices.

A second limitation concerns the appropriate employee level of leaders identified for participation in the leadership development program. This discussion will be limited to and oriented for leadership skill sets needed at mid-level management levels and is not intended for the higher levels such as senior general schedule or Senior Executive Service managers. Therefore, only the mid-levels of employment are considered when identifying the target population for VBA's leadership development program.

Qualitative research and survey methodologies pose a third limitation to the research. This type of methodology is limited by the willingness of prospective respondents to respond in a valuable qualitative manner, and to be honest in their responses.

Finally, time constraints constitute a limitation of the study. The research window available limited the researcher's ability to expand the research to a larger audience within VBA.

Delimitations

The study included a document review from both inside and outside of VA in order to provide a means of comparison for leadership development programs.

Conclusion

VA is a large organization with a massive mission and a hefty budget. Within VA, VBA faces a disproportionate amount of the fiscal and public pressure currently placed on the administration, straining the administration's employees as they deal with pressure

to meet challenging goals. This study explores whether VBA should develop a leadership development program as a possible means of increasing leadership capacity to cope with increasing demands. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the topic intended to provide the depth and understanding necessary to address the primary and secondary research questions thereby providing solid evidence and argument as to whether VBA should develop a leadership development program.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Leadership is a broad topic, and one that has been reviewed for many years and from many angles. However, the backbone of this research hinges on understanding the importance of developing leaders within an organization, the concept of a learning organization, and the organizational benefits of adopting a learning culture. With this backdrop, chapter 2 defines what leadership development and leader development mean and discuss the differences between these two terms in order to determine which best aligns with employee development recommendations for VBA. After conceptualizing applicability to VBA, the chapter reviews literature specific to the organization. In 2012, VA commissioned a task force, the Leadership Development System Task Force (LDSTF)¹⁵ to review leadership development opportunities, needs, and gaps across the organization. The task force's research, findings, and recommendations were reviewed. Additionally, to help tie the concept of leadership development to the organization's culture, internal literature was reviewed that provided clarity on the organization's core values and the competencies expected of employees. This literature included pamphlets, brochures, websites, and other sources produced for employee education, providing great insight into the organization's willingness to embrace and move forward with initiatives related to employee development.

¹⁵Department of Veterans Affairs, *Leadership Development System Task Force*.

In order to provide a basis for the existing leadership development infrastructure within VBA, current leadership development and leader development programs are described. These program description not only set the premise for the creation of a new leadership development program, but provide potential suggestions for content, structure, and methodology. Similarly, leadership development and leader development programs within other administrations and offices of VA are described as additional sources from which to pull best practices and ideas.

Next, the U.S. Army's approach to leadership development is introduced. The Army's lifetime model of leadership development, as seen through the example of an officer's development, provides potential ideas for content, structure, best practices, and lessons learned.

In the final sections of chapter 2, the concepts of a learning organization and an emotionally intelligent organization are defined and discussed. These two concepts align with a discussion on successful leadership development programs, based on various research studies and leadership development literature sources.

Leadership Development Versus Leader Development

In 2001, one of the leading researchers on leader development, Daniel Day, completed a contextual review of the existing sources on the topic. His review included research studies, a leadership development survey by *The Conference Board*, books and book chapters, and a publication that summarized the past 30 years of leadership development research. Based on these reviews, Day summarized in "Leadership Development: A Review in Context," that the concepts of leadership development and

leader development were different, but linked. Day described leadership development as focused on “building networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organization value”¹⁶ and the social capital is the developmental target. With leadership development, the focus is greater than the individual; it is relational. Leadership development helps individuals integrate with others and with the organization by increasing competencies such as social and social awareness skills. These might include collaboration and cooperation, conflict management, and empathy.

On the other hand, Day described leader development as emphasizing “individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles”¹⁷ where human capital is the developmental target. The developmental focus is on the individual and competencies including self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. The specific skills might be self confidence, adaptability, and initiative.

These two concepts are intricately linked, as leader development, focused on the individual, develops leaders who will then be able to participate in leadership development to create organizational-level value. Both are important to VBA, however, the current focus identified for this study is leadership development as it provides a way to link the individual with the organization, leading to a change in the organizational culture conducive to learning.

¹⁶Day, 585.

¹⁷Ibid., 584.

VA's Core Values and Their Applicability to Leaders

VA's Core Values Model: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (I CARE)

VA currently focuses on three fundamental principles in its quest to transform into a 21st century organization: being people-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking. Related to these fundamental principles, VA defined its core values as integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence.¹⁸ Together, these five values form the acronym, "I CARE" (figure 4).

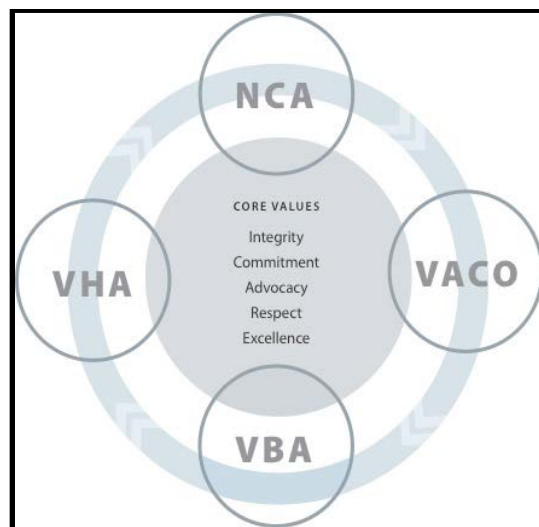


Figure 4. VA's Core Values Model

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA Core Values and Characteristics: Because I CARE, I Will...* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012), 9.

¹⁸Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA: I CARE Overview Presentation," June 28, 2012, http://www.va.gov/ICARE/docs/icare_overview.pdf (accessed November 11, 2013).

VA’s “I CARE” motto (figure 5) provides an effective foundation when discussing the organization’s conceptualization of what it wants out of its leaders. The way it defines its leaders will determine what is most important in how its leaders are developed. Two of the “I CARE” values can be directly tied to leadership development: commitment and excellence. Part of VA’s definition of commitment speaks to the importance of leadership development because it asks employees to be committed to fulfilling their individual and organizational responsibilities. Similarly, VA’s definition for excellence also speaks to the need for leadership development by asking employees to focus on thoughtful and decisive leadership while striving for continuous improvements.

BECAUSE I CARE, I WILL...	
□ INTEGRITY	Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.
□ COMMITMENT	Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.
□ ADVOCACY	Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.
□ RESPECT	Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.
□ EXCELLENCE	Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

Figure 5. VA’s Core Values “I CARE” Model

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA Core Values and Characteristics: Because I CARE, I Will...* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012), 8.

VA's Six Core Characteristics for Leaders

Additionally, VA recently identified six core characteristics for its leaders: trustworthy, accessible, quality, innovative, agile, and integrated.¹⁹ These core characteristics also speak to the importance of leadership development within VA, particularly quality, innovative, and agile. VA defines its ability to provide quality through employees who are empowered, trusted by their leaders, and respected for their competence and dedication. VA views itself as innovative because it prizes curiosity and initiative, and encourages creative contributions from employees. The organization remains agile by adapting to challenges and new requirements to continuously assess the environment and devise better solutions. Considering and incorporating these characteristics into the leadership development program will promote related skill sets in the employees who participate.

VA's All-Employee and Leadership Competencies

Under the direction of the Secretary Eric Shinseki, VA developed leadership competencies for its employees (figure 6). This was a new concept within VA and a valiant effort to move the organization forward to an employee-development perspective. This initiative provided standardized competencies that employees department-wide could use as the basis for understanding how to be successful in their current positions as well as setting guidelines for expectations at the next levels of responsibility within the

¹⁹Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA Core Values and Characteristics: Because I CARE, I Will...* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012), 12.

organization. The agency produced hard copy versions of brochures, guides, and other literature, as well as an online presence to present the information to its employees.

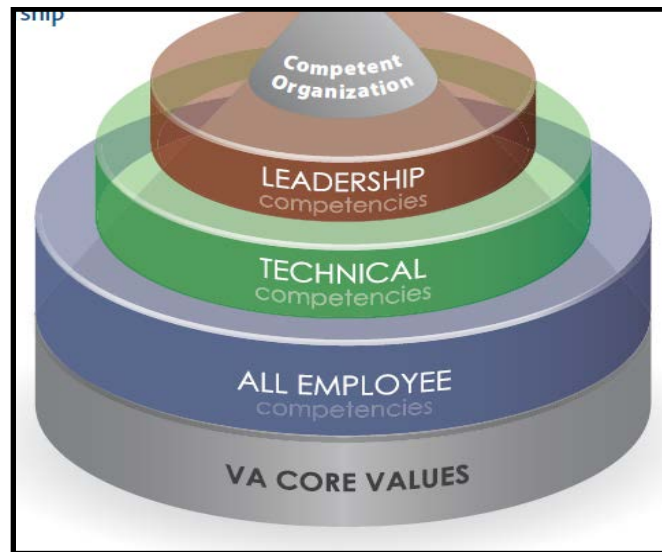


Figure 6. VA's All-Employee and Leadership Competencies Model

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Learning University, *Leadership Competencies: Building a Competent Organization* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs), i.

The introduction of the leadership competencies brochure includes the statement that the “success of VA in accomplishing this important mission [of improving service to our Nation’s Veterans] is highly dependent upon the capacity of its workforce.”²⁰ The brochure then outlined three primary tasks that VA believed best described effective leadership: determining the way forward, deciding how to achieve results, and engaging

²⁰Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Learning University, *Leadership Competencies: Building a Competent Organization* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs), i.

others to accomplish the mission. The competency model - designed to provide knowledge, skills, and abilities for achieving effective leadership - consisted of three critical competency areas: all employee competencies, technical competencies, and leadership competencies. For the purposes of this study, technical competencies—technical skills that are needed specific to the job or occupation - are outside the scope of the proposed question.

VA's All-Employee Competencies

All-employee competencies (figure 7) are defined as those needed by all VA employees to be successful. These competencies serve as a foundation and are broken into six categories: communication, interpersonal effectiveness, critical thinking, organizational stewardship, Veteran and customer focus, and personal mastery. Communication includes both effective written and oral communication. Interpersonal effectiveness includes the ability to demonstrate empathy, foster inclusion and diversity, and contribute to a high-performing team. Critical thinking includes creative problem-solving and good judgment. Organizational stewardship includes integrity, accountability, organization and prioritization skills, and effective use of resources. Veteran and customer focus includes advocating for Veterans and meeting customer needs. And personal mastery includes exhibiting self-awareness and a dedication to self-development, as well as demonstrating resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency.

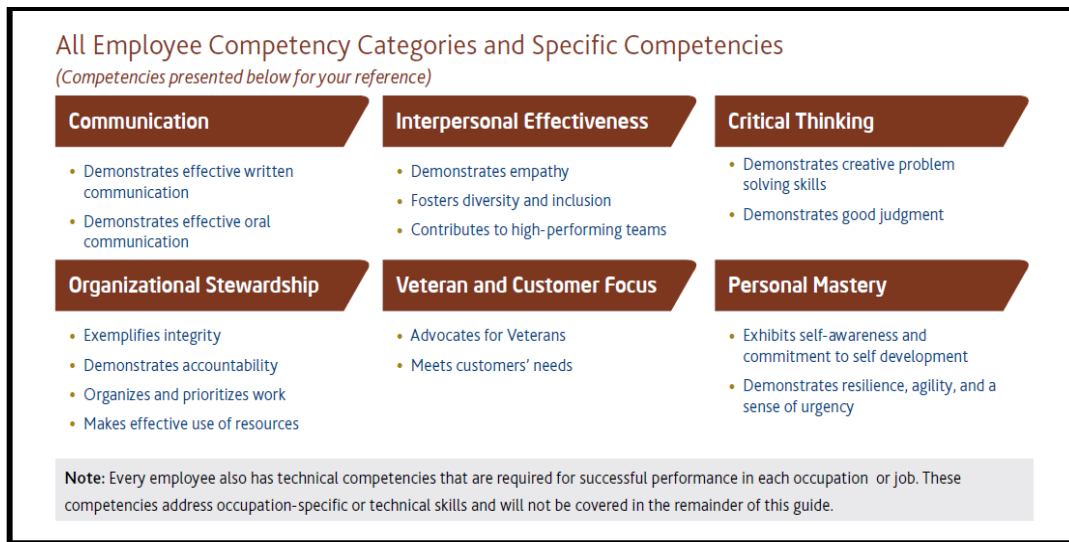


Figure 7. VA's All-Employee Competencies

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Learning University, *Leadership Competencies: Building a Competent Organization* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs), 2.

VA's Leadership Competencies

Different from the All-Employee competencies, VA provides and defines leadership competencies as those needed for success in a formal leadership role (figure 8). Leading change encourages championing innovation and communicating vision to drive change. Global perspective requires ensuring strategic alignment and enhancing outcomes for Veterans. Results driven includes fostering reasonable risk-taking, driving execution, and fostering accountability while business acumen emphasizes applying forward-looking human capital management principles, applying sound financial and material resource management, and employing technology effectively. Leading people promotes leadership at all levels, inspiring continuing learning and development, and

building high-performing and diverse teams. Finally, building coalitions encourages driving integration, building and maintaining partnerships, demonstrating political savvy, and effectively managing conflicts.



Figure 8. VA's Leadership Competencies

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Learning University, *Leadership Competencies: Building a Competent Organization* (Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs), 4.

VA Leadership Development System Task Force

In April 2012, the Chief of Staff of VA commissioned the Leadership Development System Task Force (LDSTF) to “design a sustainable process to develop leaders . . . and provide the foundation for synchronization of efforts in terms of

leadership development within the organization.”²¹ The task force’s charter identified five objectives, including the development of a conceptual framework for a systems-approach to leadership development to be used as a basis for all of VA’s leadership opportunities. The task force developed the *Concept for the VA Leadership Development System* (LDS), a systematic leadership ladder approach for employee career development and identified the “need to address both the leadership and functional/technical development needs of an employee.”²² They also identified that as an employee advances within his or her career, the need for leadership competencies increases and is based on previously attained functional/technical expertise.²³ The task force’s research identified critical turning points in an employee’s career, as they transitioned from one employment level to the next. These critical turning points were identified as the most important time for an employee to receive support, development, and training, as a way to ensure their success at the higher level. Finally, the task force found that employees who were moved into higher positions without the necessary tools were often more likely to fail in their new positions.²⁴

The task force recommended a two-pronged approach including top-down policy guidance and bottom-up employee engagement to the LDS. They identified common

²¹Kevin R. Taylor, “Department of Veterans Affairs: Leadership Development from the Ground Up” (Interagency Fellowship Paper, Command and General Staff College, 2013), 3.

²²*Ibid.*, 5.

²³*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴*Ibid.*

career paths within VA and mapped critical competencies for those career paths based on level and grade.

Current Leadership and Leader Programs within VBA

The LDSTF conducted a comprehensive review of all of the existing leadership programs currently in existence within VA. This included programs that were available to employees at an organizational level and programs available within each administration. For the purposes of this study, only the programs within VBA will be reviewed. The LDSTF identified eight leadership programs within VBA: Leadership Enhancement and Development Program, Leadership Development Program, Leadership Coaching Program, Assistant Director Development Program, Introduction to Leadership Program, Initial Supervisor Training, Division Leadership and Management Training, and the Presidential Management Fellows Program. Additionally, many regional offices offer entry-level employees with leadership development opportunities catered specifically to their office and responsibilities. Examples of this include Leadership Bay Pines at the Saint Petersburg Regional Office in Florida and a leadership program at the Salt Lake Regional Office in Utah.

Leadership Enhancement and Development Program

VBA's Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) Program is a nine-month program for employees at grades nine through twelve. It is a coveted program, with only 35 employees selected annually. The program's mission is to develop high-performing employees in order to enhance the development of skills needed for increased leadership roles. Because the mission focuses on increased leadership roles, it is actually

a leader development program, and not a leadership development one. Each participant is assigned a mentor who guides them through the duration of the program and helps them create and monitor their progress using an individual development plan (IDP). The program includes three resident sessions, a week-long shadowing experience with an assigned mentor, and the opportunity to spend four days at VBA's Central Office in Washington DC. LEAD each participant is assigned to be part of a group project, with a written paper and presentation of findings expected at the conclusion of the program. The announcement for LEAD is made each year through the release of an internal memorandum (referred to as a VBA Letter) and an intranet website posting. Eligible applicants must apply through an application. Application reviews narrow the candidate pool significantly. The remaining candidates are provided the opportunity to interview with a panel, leading to the final selections.

Leadership Development Program

The VBA Leadership Development Program (LDP) is a 12-14 month program for employees at grades 12, 13, and 14. The program seeks to identify and develop high-performing mid-level employees for senior-level leadership positions. Again, with a focus on placement in a leadership position, this program is a leader development program. Each participant is assigned a mentor and creates an IDP. The program structure includes resident sessions, a shadowing experience with their mentor, and a 30-day (or greater) detail assignment. Focus is placed on elements of the organization's mission, including working more efficiently with less resources, budget, leveraging technology, and developing subordinate employees. Networking is also important.

Similar to LEAD, an internal announcement is made each year for candidates; eligible candidates are selected based on the quality of their application and interview.

Leadership Coaching Program

VBA's Leadership Coaching Program (LCP) is a six-to-twelve month program for recently selected Regional Office and Headquarter Division Managers. Each participant is assigned a mentor and creates an IDP. LCP provides participants with leadership, managerial, and career development training through one-on-one sessions with an Executive Coach as well as three group resident sessions. The goal of the program is to enhance the selectee's organizational performance by improving communication, problem-solving, conflict-management skills. It is unclear how selection for this program occurs.

Assistant Director Development Program

The VBA Assistant Director Development Program (ADDP) is a two-year program committed to developing high-performing employees at grades 13, 14, and 15 for future Assistant Director positions. The program varies for each selectee, with a combination of residential sessions, online learning, self-development, and group projects. However, each participant is assigned a mentor and creates an IDP. Perhaps the most important aspect of the program is the requirement to fulfill a long-term detail assignment, which could potentially lead to placement in that role. ADDP is unique in that it is announced as a job opportunity. Interested employees apply through the USA Jobs website and compete as they would for any new job placement.

Introduction to Leadership Program and Initial Supervisor Training

VBA's Introduction to Leadership Program (ITL) is a two-to-three week residential course for new first-line supervisors (usually called Coaches). Typically, these are employees at grade 12 or 13. The program's goal is to provide tools needed by these employees to be successful as new leaders within the organization. The course focuses on skills including time management, delegation, resolution of workplace issues, analyzing data, and motivating subordinates. In order to attend ITL, new supervisors must first complete the VBA Initial Supervisor Training (IST). This is a 30-hour curriculum comprised mostly of online, self-paced modules that provide supervisory fundamentals. Practical application occurs under the guidance of an assigned mentor at the employee's office. ITL and IST are considered the formal training program for new supervisors, and typically will be the only standardized training that these employees will receive to prepare them for their new supervisory positions.

Division Leadership and Management Training

The VBA Division Leadership and Management Training (DLMT) is a two-week resident course required for first-time division chiefs. The course is more focused on organizational understanding than on individual development, with emphasis on VA's mission, budget, human resources issues, agency utilization of technology, and workforce planning. Some elements of personal development are incorporated, including a personal assessment to understand how they fit as their new team's leader, a discussion on how to avoid failed leadership pitfalls, and a module on emotional intelligence. The goal of the

program is to provide baseline organizational-level training that will assist the employees in their new positions of leadership.

VBA Programs in Review

VBA also participates in the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program. This program is a government-wide program created to draw outstanding people with master's or doctorate degrees to appropriate entry-level positions within the federal government. Although VBA does offer this unique leadership opportunity, the program is considered outside the realm of the current study because the program is not open to current VA employees.

In reviewing these eight programs, it is interesting to note that only four of them are actually structured as leadership or leader development programs. Two of the programs, ITL and IST, are components of the same training process and should probably be counted together and not individually. These two, along with DLMT, are meant to provide job training, tools, and skills rather than employee leadership development.

Current Leadership and Leader Programs within VA

For the purposes of this study, only VBA's leadership and leader development and leadership development programs were reviewed on a program-by-program basis. However, it is important to know that within the greater VA environment, many other development programs exist. It is important to take into consideration these other programs because they pinpoint specific skills that are important to VA's culture and clientele as well as skills that are important to federal employees. Additionally, because they already exist within VA's culture, it can be assumed that the models used have

already been tried and improved upon to best fit VA's culture. To point, VA Central Office reported seven different employee development programs, VHA reported ten, NCA reported three, the Board of Veterans' Appeals has one, the Office of General Counsel has one, and the Office of Information Technology reported seventeen.

VA Central Office Programs

Of the seven programs offered by VA Central Office only one program, Leadership VA, encouraged critical thinking, results-oriented leadership, meeting the needs of a diverse population of customers, collaboration skills, and strategic leadership skills. Leadership VA uses a blended model that combines workshops, lectures, assessments, coaching, and challenge teams. Another program, The Institute for Management Excellence, provided opportunity to participate in VA-wide projects and initiatives where innovation is key. Two of the programs, the Aspiring Leaders Program and the High Performing Leaders Program, use the development of a Mentoring Action Plan, based on VA's core leadership competencies, as a way for the participant to identify goals, monitor their accomplishments, and evaluate their effectiveness. These two programs match participants with senior VA leaders who are certified mentors; the mentors help to foster the learning process through the course of the program. In addition to an on-going relationship with their assigned mentor, the participants also have the opportunity to spend a day during one of the classroom sessions in a roundtable discussion with other participants and a senior VA leader. This discussion provides the participants a one-time opportunity to learn from a situational mentor as well as each other's experiences. Unfortunately, these two programs, which were originally created as

a blended model, were restructured into a fully virtual experience, and are now both in a paused status.

Veterans Health Administration Programs

Some of the interesting concepts found in the various VHA programs include an immersion program that includes structured training as well as on-the-job experiences facilitated by a senior employee. One program, the Health Care Leadership Development Program, is structured as a year-long collateral duty program that includes four week-long sessions. In between sessions, participants complete assignments, coaching sessions, and workplace activities. One truly fascinating program within VHA is their Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, and Development Program. This program provides participants with the opportunity to develop their formal and informal leadership skills through individual and group learning activities that are administered locally but based on a national standardized curriculum. Another VHA program, the Senior Executive Orientation, is a series of four, two-day sessions on important leadership topics. The sessions are offered on a rotating basis so that participants can drop in on a session, one at a time, based on their schedule, so long as they complete all four sessions within one year. VHA is in the process of creating a new program, the Clinical Nurse Leader Program, which also provides an interesting model. This program is being structured as a multi-year program, providing various leadership skills over time.

National Cemetery Administration Programs

NCA has a program called the Cemetery Director Intern Program, which is a one-year residency program that provides the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to be a

Cemetery Director. The program builds competencies including trust and integrity, oral and written communication, coaching, stress tolerance, adaptability, program-solving, decision-making, innovation, change management, and customer service. Another program, the Leadership Institute, is a leadership development program for high potential employees. NCA looks at three criteria to identify potential candidates for this program: their desire to learn, work hard, and move into a leadership role; their status as a high performer in their current roles; and evidence that they possess elements of VA's core competencies.

Other VA Programs

Other programs within VA include the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the Office of General Counsel, and the Office of Information Technology. The program at the Board of Veterans' Appeals is a shadowing program that provides participants with the opportunity to experience a week in the life of a senior leader that includes attending high level meetings. The Office of General Counsel's Lawyers as Leaders Program includes a developmental assignment of a real-world issue where the participant will present their research and suggestions to their senior leaders. Although the Office of Information Technology uses mostly computer-based trainings to provide their leadership and training opportunities, they do have a very unique concept through the use of a monthly lunch and learn program to enhance leadership skills.

U.S. Army Leadership Development

Colonel Wayne Grigsby Jr., the Director of the School of Advanced Military Studies in 2011 and now Brigadier General Grigsby serving as Commanding General of

the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, may have been a bit biased when he made the statement that the “U.S. Army is simply the very best leadership factory on the planet,” during a presentation.²⁵ However, this sentiment is not limited to only him, but shared by many others. Indeed, in his book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter M. Senge discusses the U.S. Army as having one of the most sophisticated learning infrastructures he has ever seen.²⁶ He attributes the Army’s success to their focus on four key components: training and formal education, practice, doctrine, and research. Training starts at entry-level and continues through the lifetime of the soldier. Practice is completed through simulations and lessons learned are conceived through after action reports. Doctrine refers to a hierarchy of publications that expresses organizational principles in a way that is clear, concise, and accessible.²⁷ Finally, research is conducted through organizational-level institutions, such as the Army Center for Lessons Learned, which helps to make lessons learned applicable for education, training, and doctrine.

The Army uses two doctrinal documents to outline its foundational leadership principles: Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22: *Army Leadership* and Army Doctrine

²⁵Colonel Wayne Grigsby, presentation as Director of School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS, May 11, 2011, as quoted by Michael C. Sevcik, “Army Learning Concept 2015: These are not the droids you are looking for,” *Small Wars Journal* (June 2011): 1-2.

²⁶Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 313.

²⁷U.S. Army, “Today’s Focus: Doctrine 2015,” U.S. Army Stand-To!, November 28, 2012, http://www.army.mil/standto/archive/issue.php?issue=2012-11-28&s_cid=standto (accessed April 23, 2014).

Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22: *Army Leadership*. ADP 6-22: *Army Leadership* defines leadership as “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”²⁸ The Army’s leadership principles apply to Army officers and enlisted at all ranks in order to help Soldiers understand the leadership attributes and characteristics expected of them. The Army’s desired outcomes include expertly led organizations, healthy climates, and sound decision-making, amongst others.²⁹

ADP 6-22: *Army Leadership* also defines four conditions of leadership: formal, informal, collective, and situational. Of these, two carry particular importance to the research at hand. Informal leadership refers to the ability for anyone to exhibit leadership, regardless of rank or position. Situational leadership refers to a leader’s ability to apply leadership skills in order to make the best decision, based on the circumstances.³⁰

Additional leadership documents, such as the Army Learning Concept detailed below, also exist to provide further clarification and guidance.

Army Learning Concept 2015

Though the Army has had a structured and successful leadership learning model for many years, it recently revised its leadership learning concept. The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015 was created to “drive change through a campaign of

²⁸U.S. Army, ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), ii-iii.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

learning”³¹ according to the then TRADOC Commanding General Martin E. Dempsey. The Army Learning Concept (ALC), published on January 20, 2011, provides the Army’s visualization of how it will train and educate its soldiers, with a goal of developing adaptable, capable thinkers and leaders. ALC is nested within the Army’s framework of concepts, including the Army Capstone Concept, the Army Operating Concept, the U.S. Army Training Concept, and the Army Leader Development Strategy.

With the adoption of ALC 2015, the Army did not shy away from a challenge, even knowing that it would require substantial changes to both policy and infrastructure. The competitive learning model is based on three steps:³²

1. Engaging learners to think about and understand the relevance and context of their topic using facilitator-led, collaborative problem-solving activities in place of standard classroom experiences
2. Tailoring the learning experience to the learner’s competency level
3. Reducing or eliminating front-of-the-class teaching styles, or lecturing, and instead focusing on a blended learning approach with a heavier emphasis on simulated experiences

Army Leadership Requirements Model

The Army Leadership Requirements Model is incorporated into the Army’s vision of leadership. The model establishes “what a leader is (attributes) and what a leader does

³¹U.S. Army, TRADOC PAM 525-8-2, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 2011), ii.

³²*Ibid.*, 9.

(competencies)”³³ by defining three attributes and three competencies required for effective leadership development. The attributes include character, presence, and intellect. The competencies include leads, develops, and achieves. Figure 9 includes a pictorial description of this model.

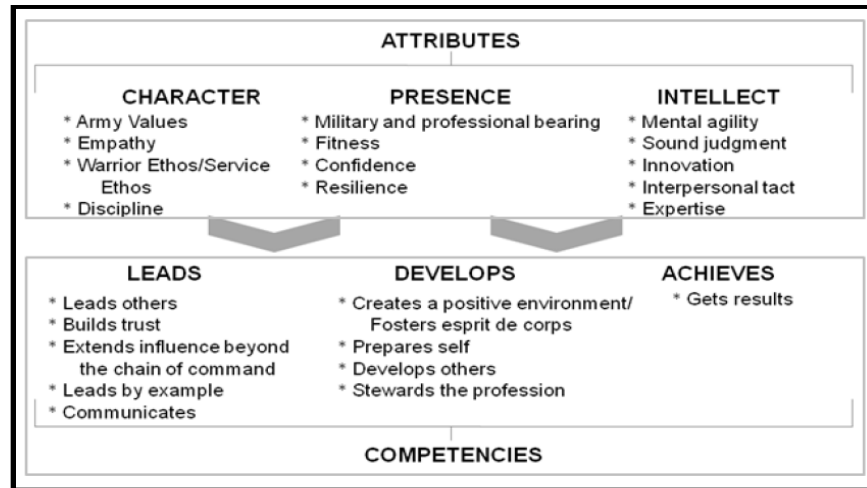


Figure 9. U.S. Army Leadership Requirements Model

Source: U.S. Army, ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, August 2012), 1-5.

Attributes describe characteristics of a leader, the things they must have. Therefore, the three attributes are expressed as nouns: character, presence, and intellect. The values that the leader embodies are character. Character includes the ethical and moral qualities used by a leader as motivation in determining right and wrong. Character is broken down into Army values: empathy, warrior ethos, and discipline. The way that

³³U.S. Army, ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, August 2012), 1-5.

others, at all levels (subordinates, equals, and commanders), see and perceive the leader is presence. Presence refers to words, actions, or even the way a person holds themselves. Presence includes military and professional bearing, fitness, confidence, and resilience. Intellect refers to the use of mental and social application when solving problems. Intellect includes mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and expertise.

Competencies are the things a leader does to impact the organization and those around them. Competencies are developed over time, and provide a basis for leading through the ability to change. Competencies are observable actions and are therefore expressed as verbs: leads, develops, and achieves. A leader leads people by building trust, extending influence beyond the chain of command, leading by example, and communicating. A leader develops the environment, creating one that is positive by preparing himself, developing others, and stewarding the profession. Finally, a leader achieves organizational goals by getting results in a way that accounts for the people and creates a positive environment.³⁴

The Army also defines three levels of leadership: direct, organizational, and strategic. Direct leadership is face-to-face, impacting the people. Organizational leadership is indirect, affecting the organization through impact on policies, resources, and climate. Strategic leadership affects the organization's strategic vision, for example through changes to force structure or resource allocation.³⁵ Each level builds on the next,

³⁴U.S. Army, ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 7.

³⁵U.S. Army, ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 2-5.

with the core competencies acquired from direct leadership being further developed and refined at the organizational and strategic levels.

The Army builds its leadership programs around these philosophies. The theoretical influence is seen throughout the programs' curriculums; the physical influence can also be seen by the display of Leadership Requirements Model posters within Army working and learning environments. Within the learning environment, the leadership attributes and competencies are emphasized and taught at every leadership development level.

Initial Leadership Development within the Army

The Army has various career and leadership development tracks, based on rank, level of education, and whether the Soldier is enlisted or is an officer. For the purposes of this study, only the career and leadership development of officers will be reviewed (figure 10). The Army provides its officers with progressive leadership development throughout their careers, beginning as early as college. Army officers are generally commissioned as second lieutenants following the achievement of a bachelor's degree and completion of additional preliminary training requirements. Many officers complete the additional requirements while in college through programs such as the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), which includes a mandatory, intensive five-week Leadership Development and Assessment Course.³⁶

³⁶U.S. Army, "Army ROTC Curriculum," <http://www.goarmy.com/rotc/courses-and-colleges/curriculum/leader-development-and-assessment.html> (accessed April 23, 2014).

Basic Officer Leadership Course

Prior to completion of ROTC, officer cadets are assigned to a branch. Following graduation from college and completion of ROTC requirements, they are commissioned as second lieutenants. Each will then typically spend their first year as an Army officer in a training status, as they attend their branch's 20-week Basic Officer Leadership Course. During this course, officer cadets are exposed to the Army's leadership attributes and competencies for the first time. At this leadership level, the expectation is conceptual understanding.

Following completion of the basic course, officers are assigned to their first leadership position, usually as a platoon leader. Over the next four to six years, they will be placed in positions of increasing responsibility as they are promoted to first lieutenant and then captain. During these years, they begin to refine the technical and tactical skills that are important within their branch, which is crucial to gain proficiency as junior officers.³⁷ During these initial years as platoon leaders, officers have their first opportunity to apply the leadership concepts, helping to solidify understanding.

Captains Career Course

Following attainment of the rank of captain, an Army officer will experience the next leadership development transition point in their career: the Captains Career Course (CCC). CCC is a 20-24 week course offered by the officer's branch. Officers are assigned

³⁷U.S. Army Engineer School and Regiment, "Engineer Basic Officer Leadership Course," Last modified April 17, 2014, http://www.wood.army.mil/USAES/EBOLC_Info.pdf (accessed April 24, 2014); U.S. Army, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015*, 45.

to a cohort run by a facilitator, an environment that encourages collaboration, networking, and peer-to-peer learning.³⁸ The curriculum is largely based on skills required for success within the officer's branch, building foundations of tactical, technical, and operational skills. However, leadership skills also play a vital role, as officers participate in exercises and practical learning opportunities where they must solve complex problems. Experiential learning and the cooperative learning environment enhances their critical thinking and judgment skills.

At this level, the emphasis for leadership development is the direct level. Officers are taught leadership skills from the perspective of the influence they have on those they directly lead. For example, they might begin to show more confidence, start making more sound judgments, or express empathy. They learn the importance of building trust and creating a positive environment. By the conclusion of this course, officers have a much better understanding of the skills needed to plan, coordinate, and facilitate operations at the next higher level of leadership.

Following completion of CCC, an officer is typically assigned to serve 15-18 months on a division, brigade, or battalion staff, then assigned to serve in a company command position, or equivalent, for 18 months. Approximately six to eight years into their service, officers select a functional area specialty. Promotion to the next rank – major – typically occurs around nine or ten years of service. At this level of service, selected officers receive their third tier of training and education, when they attend the U.S. Army Command and General Staff Officers' Course (CGSOC).

³⁸U.S. Army, *U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015*, 47, 54.

Command and General Staff Officers' Course

CGSOC is the intermediate level education stage of an officer's career development. Occurring approximately midway through a career Soldier's tenure, CGSOC is a requirement for an officer to continue from the rank of Major to the next level of leadership. For the first time in an officer's career, attendance for a leadership development opportunity is not a certainty. However, most Majors are provided the opportunity to attend.

The ten-month course is a full-time assignment and officers spend the duration working and learning in a classroom environment. Like CCC, the officers are organized into cohorts with an assigned facilitator. However, cohorts are arranged so that as many branches as possible are represented, allowing the officers to learn from each other's experiences. The course uses adult learning theory and the Socratic teaching method to encourage professional and personal growth. Intended to provide the overarching skills and abilities necessary to be successful as field grade officers, the course focuses on higher-level cognitive skills including advanced critical thinking and adaptability, while emphasizing the importance of decision-making and problem-solving. In addition to peer-to-peer learning, the course uses group problem-centered instruction, facilitation, collaboration, and experiential training techniques. Writing assignments interspersed throughout the course improve written communication skills.

The curriculum includes required tracks in leadership, military history, logistics and resource operations, joint operations, and tactics as well as elective credits.³⁹ The sessions taught within the leadership track include 22 classes and span almost the full course of the program. The first block utilizes case studies and classroom discussion to introduce ideas, processes, and tools that can be used in fulfilling the learning objective of helping “field grade officers lead in the development of organizations and leaders to achieve results.”⁴⁰ Some of the sessions include leading change, organizational culture and climate, managing organizational stress, and developing learning organizations. The second block provides application and analytics of the lessons learned in the first block and includes sessions on complexity, decision-making, effective followership, and moral courage.

CGSOC prepares officers for increased responsibility and the emphasis of leadership development is organizational. Officers need to be able to think beyond only the direct influence they have on subordinates and begin to consider their organizational influence as well. For example, they are no longer expected just to display sound judgment but also apply critical thinking processes; they must deal with complex decision-making and still achieve results, even during the most uncertain or ambiguous situations. Upon graduation from the course, officers possess the competencies and skills

³⁹U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Command and General Staff College, “CGSC Catalog,” Last modified May 13, 2014, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/repository/350-1.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2014).

⁴⁰U.S. Army Command and General Staff Officer Course, L100: *Developing Organizations and Leaders Block Advance Sheet* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 2013), 1.

necessary to achieve organizational objectives, can consider the impact of culture on military operations, and take creative yet ethical approaches to meeting organizational challenges. For many officers, CGSOC is the capstone level of their formal professional development through the Army.⁴¹

Advanced Army Leadership Development

A select few will continue on to complete a second ten-month program called the School of Advanced Military Studies, and some may be further selected to attend the U.S. Army War College. Because these two programs are advanced levels of education, they are considered outside the realm of the current study. A brief overview of these two programs is included in the chart below for comparison with the other leadership development opportunities discussed above. However, what is important to note is that even at this advanced level of leadership development, leadership attributes and competencies continue to be emphasized. At this level, the leadership requirements model is at the strategic level.

⁴¹U.S. Army, *U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015*, 26, 47, 55-57.

U.S. Army's Officer Education System ³⁴		
Program Name	Program Length	Program Description
Basic Officer Leader Course	Varies according to branch	Develops Army values and core leadership attributes in junior officers as well as branch-defined technical and tactical skills for demonstrated proficiency at platoon and company levels
Captains Career Course	21 weeks	Second level of an officer's primary Education, following Basic Officer Leader Courses A and B; Prepares company grade officers for company level command or battalion and brigade staff positions
Command and General Staff Officers College	10 months (resident)	Intermediate-level education of an officer's career development that prepares majors for full-spectrum operations (Note: This course is also offered via distance learning, with variations to length and description.)
School of Advanced Military Studies	10 months	Education for selected officers on operational art and doctrine for command and general staff positions at tactical and operational echelons
U.S. Army War College	10 months resident or 2	Senior level education for developing strategic leaders

Figure 10. U.S. Army's Officer Education System

Source: U.S. Army, TRADOC PAM 525-8-2, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 2011), 47-48.

Learning Organizations and Adopting an Organizational Culture of Learning

By providing leadership development opportunities for its employees, VBA is creating a "learning organization" culture. Peter M. Senge defines a learning organization as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured."⁴² He proposed five foundational components that must be met for an organization to become a learning organization: the organization must embrace systems thinking as an integrated

⁴²Senge, 3.

way to improve decision-making, the members of the organization must gain personal mastery through continuous learning, there must be mental models in place within the organization, the members of the organization must have a shared mental model as a vision of the future, and the team members of the organization must contribute to each other's development through team learning.⁴³

Grasping these five foundational components moves the organization towards becoming one that is “continually expanding its capacity to create its future.”⁴⁴ Within a learning organization, the people, culture, procedures, and systems are all interrelated, “each affecting and being affected by the others.”⁴⁵ There is a clear link between the individual and the organization. Senge states, “Organizations learn only through individuals who learn.”⁴⁶ To develop this environment, learning organizations emphasize the importance of employee improvement, which motivates employees to want to learn. Senge also discusses how the key to learning within an organization is the existence of a supportive learning infrastructure.⁴⁷ Supporting learning infrastructures lead to improved social interaction which can break down communication barriers and encourage successful team interaction. In this environment, employees at all levels know how to

⁴³Brenda Scott-Ladd and Christopher C.A. Chan, “Emotional Intelligence and Participations in Decision-Making: Strategies for Promoting Organizational Learning and change,” *Strategic Change* 13, no. 2 (March/April 2004): 97-98.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁵Charlene Marmer Solomon, “HR Facilitates the Learning Organization Concept,” *Personnel Journal* 73, no. 11 (November 1994): 58.

⁴⁶Senge, 129.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 312-313.

adapt, make difficult decisions, and overcome obstacles. They are more capable of taking the lead and coming up with creative or innovative solutions. By doing this, they contribute to the organization's learning and create a reinforcing cycle.⁴⁸

Becoming a learning organization sets the stage for organizational learning. Defined as the activities and processes that an organization creates in order to achieve progress and change, organizational learning leads to "improvements in efficiency, productivity and innovation,"⁴⁹ Implementing organizational learning helps the organization to "shape a culture conducive to learning,"⁵⁰ promotes innovation and resiliency at all employee levels, and enables employees to respond to change proactively⁵¹ Proactive employee reactions to change and challenges within the organization allows it to thrive, even during difficult times.

Emotionally Intelligent Organizations

Another link between organizational learning and employees is the concept of emotional intelligence. One of the leading researchers in emotional intelligence (EQ), defined it as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's own thinking and

⁴⁸Scott-Ladd and Chan, 99.

⁴⁹Ibid., 97.

⁵⁰Brigid L. Bechtold, "Evolving to Organizational Learning," *Hospital Materiel Management Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (February 2000): 23.

⁵¹Soloman, 56-66.

actions.”⁵² EQ is important in the discussion of organizational culture because studies have found that employees who possess higher level of EQ “contribute substantially to higher performance.”⁵³

The concept of EQ, therefore, has great implication to leadership development. Employees with high EQ can apply their ability to perceive their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, to managing and motivating others.⁵⁴ These employees are able to cultivate relationships, successfully collaborate, and network.⁵⁵ They are capable of reading non-verbal signals, such as tone, gestures, and facial expressions,⁵⁶ a helpful skill during times of verbal communication (such as meetings or other interpersonal interactions). Additionally, a link has been shown between empathy (a trait often associated with high EQ), moral judgment, and ethics.⁵⁷ In the workplace, these employees are likely to make ethically sound business decisions that will benefit the organization as well as those around them.

⁵²Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, “Emotional Intelligence,” *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality* 9 (1990): 189.

⁵³Scott-Ladd and Chan, 96.

⁵⁴John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David R. Caruso, “Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications,” *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (2004): 209.

⁵⁵Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2006), 160-162.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 104-105.

High EQ employees build trust, which can lead to quicker resolution of unanticipated problems.⁵⁸ When dealing with issues, they are able to cope with conflict, air grievances as helpful critiques, create an environment of acceptance and diversity, and put difficulties behind them in order to focus on resolutions. High EQ employees possess a sense of organizational savvy that allows them to seek outcomes that benefit others as well as themselves.⁵⁹ Finally, high EQ employees are more likely to see workplace events from the organization's perspective and understand not to hold the organization accountable for all of their feelings of frustration within the workplace.⁶⁰

Successful Leadership Development Programs

Though there may be many reasons that an organization chooses to invest in the development of its employees, one of the dominant reasons that surfaced was an organizational desire to enhance and protect human capital, particularly if that organization wants to see a return on investment through improved employee skills.⁶¹ Additionally, a review of several corporations invested in leadership development found that it is a best practice to “grow leaders” as opposed to “buying them”⁶² because these

⁵⁸Goleman, 160-162.

⁵⁹Scott-Ladd and Chan, 100.

⁶⁰Ibid., 96.

⁶¹David P. Lepak and Scott A. Snell, “The Human Resource Architecture: Toward a Theory of Human Capital Allocation and Development,” *Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 1 (1999): 35.

⁶²Robert M. Fulmer and Marshall Goldsmith, *The Leadership Investment: How the World's Best Organizations Gain Strategic Advantage through Leadership Development* (New York: AMACOM, 2001), 15.

employees grow within the organizational culture, and thus have an understanding of the unique challenges inherent to the organization when they step into positions of leadership.

Correctly structuring a leadership development program is crucial to its success, as research conducted on best practices within leadership development programs shows that organizations that do not have properly structured processes in place will be at a disadvantage.⁶³ However, when determining which components to include within the program, the research is rather varied. Some of the research is based on application and looks at best practices within successful organizations. For example, Fulmer and Goldsmith include a list of high impact features of leadership development programs based on best practices from an international selection of organizations. This list includes action learning, cross-functional rotations, 360 evaluations, exposure to senior executives, coaching, and mentoring, amongst others.⁶⁴ Other research is based on academic findings; a journal article by John Wills provides a review of research conducted on the components of successful leadership development programs and includes a combined approach of executive coaching and detailed personal development plans with intensive leadership training, aligned with the long-term goals of the business, linked with the individual's development and career goals, and fully supported by senior

⁶³Elliott Jacques, *Requisite Organization: The CEO's Guide to Creative Structure and Leadership* (London: Gower Publishing, 1989); Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood, *Leadership Brand: Developing Customer-Focused Leaders to Drive Performance and Build Lasting Value* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007); Noel M. Tichey, *The Leadership Engine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

⁶⁴Fulmer and Goldsmith, 284.

management.⁶⁵ Both methods provide valuable insights regarding different components that might be included within a leadership development program. Day approaches his recommendations for inclusion by merging both applied and academic theories as a way to create a program that will achieve the greatest results. His leadership development review suggests the use of multiple “practices” including a 360-degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, and action learning within leader development programs.⁶⁶ Regardless of the method, many of the same components appear in the recommendations for components that should be included. Some of these components are discussed in further detail below.

One common theme was discussion of the importance of considering the organization’s culture when creating the program. A successful program must be tied to the organization’s imperatives, strategic initiatives, and specific culture.⁶⁷ One way to do this is to solicit direct input from the organization’s leaders.⁶⁸ This not only helps to ensure alignment with organizational culture, but also encourages buy-in.

Another trend in the literature was the inclusion of senior leaders not only with the development of the program but also as an active component of the program. Research on effective leadership development programs shows that the ones that produce the best leaders are those in which senior executives not only are a part of the program’s

⁶⁵John Wills, “Leader Development,” *Leadership Excellence* 29, no. 2 (February 2012): 14.

⁶⁶Day, 588-606.

⁶⁷Fulmer and Goldsmith, 6.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 3.

planning, but also take an active part as mentors, coaches, and role models.⁶⁹ The research goes on to suggest that the tone of the overall quality of the program is anchored in the organization's initial level of commitment to the program, owing much to the support garnered by these senior leaders.⁷⁰ The research also indicated that including senior management in the facilitation of the program encourages buy-in by allowing them to be involved with the program's focuses and goals. This results in more program legitimacy, leading to a higher likelihood that these leaders will support the program and provide necessary resources.⁷¹ A final point regarding the inclusion of senior leaders was from Fulmer and Goldsmith that found in quite a few of the organizations they reviewed, many of the senior executives were products of their organization's leadership development system.⁷² Tying past leadership development participants with current and future participants builds a network that encourages a learning culture.

When considering who to select for participation in leadership development programs, several studies linked development opportunities with individual performance.⁷³ One study provided a warning; the study identified that many employers

⁶⁹Fulmer and Goldsmith, 24.

⁷⁰Ibid., 29.

⁷¹Kelly M. Hannum, Jennifer W. Martineau, and Claire Reinelt. *The Handbook of Leadership Development Evaluation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Business and Management Series and The Center for Creative Leadership, 2007), 206.

⁷²Fulmer and Goldsmith, 15.

⁷³Mark A. Royal and Rebecca C. Masson, "Building a Culture of Employee Development," *Human Resource Executive Online*, March 16, 2009, <http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/view/story.jhtml?id=184645440> (accessed January 5, 2014).

have a tendency to select a small group of employees to invest and develop, leading to reduced turnover and greater attachment to the company within that select group.

However, they also identified that these same employers tend to remain detached from the remaining peripheral employees, potentially at the expense of higher turnover and less organizational commitment from this larger subset of employees.⁷⁴ A more balanced approach when considering a selection process is to consider a wide scope of employees, focusing early in an employee's career in order to "cultivat[e] young 'potentials' to become truly effective future leaders."⁷⁵

A lot of the literature on leadership development programs stresses the importance of mentoring. Mentoring refers to a "long-term relationship in which a senior executive supports the professional and personal development of a junior executive,"⁷⁶ Professional mentoring is linked to enhanced professional development, improved productivity, increased retention, and enhanced strategic business initiatives.⁷⁷ Research shows that mentors help guide development, suggest performance goals, give feedback,

⁷⁴Garth Mangum, Donald Mayall, and Kristin Nelson, "The Temporary Help Industry: A Response to the Dual Internal Labor Market," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 38, no. 4 (1985): 599.

⁷⁵Kets de Vries and Korotov, 8.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁷Management Mentors, "Five Ways Corporate Mentoring Will Help Your Company," http://www.management-mentors.com/5-ways-corporate-mentoring-helps-companies?&__hssc=&__hstc&hsCtaTracking=3ff1dece-8a94-4ec4-9dc1-c469aaf32c50%7C387646be-d1fc-47a1-8f9a-6e8e46047fcf (accessed May 12, 2014).

and generally motivate the participant.⁷⁸ Mentoring can expose aspiring leaders to new or alternative perspectives.⁷⁹ Mentoring provides opportunity for internal knowledge transfer, encourages diversity, and keeps employees engaged.⁸⁰ Mentoring is also linked to improved work attitudes.⁸¹

In almost all of the mentoring models discussed within the literature, mentoring referred to a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee. However, a unique approach to mentoring is embodied in a concept utilized by the Kansas Leadership Center, a grant-funded organization in Wichita, Kansas. The Kansas Leadership Center provides various modes of leadership training to the general public as a way to encourage community leadership. One of their programs, “On the Balcony”, provides leadership mentoring through a monthly teleconference conducted on a different topic each month. The call connects a community leader with expertise on the specified topic with

⁷⁸Richard R. Kilburg, *Executive Coaching: Developing Managerial Wisdom in a World of Chaos* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006).

⁷⁹Aoife McDermott, Rachel Kidney, and Patrick Flood, “Understanding Leader Development: Learning from Leaders,” *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal* 32, no. 4 (2011): 360.

⁸⁰Chronus Corporation, “Five Benefits of a Workplace Mentoring Program,” www.chronus.com (accessed May 12, 2014).

⁸¹Lillian T. Eby, Tammy D. Allen, Sarah C. Evans, Thomas Ng, and David DuBois, “Does Mentoring Matter? A Multidisciplinary Meta-Analysis Comparing Mentored and non-Mentored Individuals,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 72, no. 2 (April 2008): 263, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2352144> (accessed May 13, 2014).

interested members of the public in order to further leadership principles and competencies and form connections amongst community resources.⁸²

Use of 360-degree evaluations is another leadership development component encouraged throughout the literature. 360-degree evaluations are a tool used by an individual to collect opinions from direct reports, supervisors, coworkers, customers, and others on that individual's performance. The benefit of a 360 evaluation is the individual has the opportunity to see a range of perceptions from those they interact with in the work environment.⁸³ The results from the second 360 evaluation should be compared to the first to reinforce the learning process.⁸⁴

Final essential elements of successful leadership development programs include making sure developmental opportunities are clearly communicated⁸⁵, ensuring participants are given continuing opportunities to utilize and apply the skills they have gained,⁸⁶ and taking advantage of leadership development efforts as a tool to reshape the organization's culture.⁸⁷

⁸²Kansas Leadership Center, "On the Balcony," <http://kansasleadershipcenter.org/alumni/on-the-balcony> (accessed May 19, 2014).

⁸³Center for Creative Leadership, "360 Assessments," <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/assessments/assessment360.aspx> (accessed May 19, 2014).

⁸⁴Fulmer and Goldsmith, 106.

⁸⁵Royal and Masson.

⁸⁶Hannum, Martineau, and Reinelt, 263.

⁸⁷Fulmer and Goldsmith, 10.

Chapters 1 and 2 provided a framework to assist in understanding VA's structure, core values, and employee competencies. Information was provided on VBA's structure, successes and challenges, and goals. Current leadership development and leader development programs within VBA, VA, and the U.S. Army were discussed. Academic research was provided on the definition of leadership development, learning organizations, and emotionally intelligent organizations. Finally, elements of successful leadership programs were discussed. Chapter 3, will provide information on the research methodology for data collection and analysis used to determine a recommendation regarding whether VBA should develop a leadership development program.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter discusses the research methods used to answer the primary and secondary research questions regarding the development of a leadership development program within VBA. As discussed in the literature review, the need for a leadership development program within VBA exists. The literature review also discusses the leadership competencies and employee qualities that VBA has identified as important for its present and future leaders. This information provides a framework to assist in answering the primary question, “Should VBA develop a leadership development program?”

The primary question is overarching and large, as there are many components that must be considered in order to ensure that VBA creates a leadership development program that is effective, respected, and meets the envisioned needs. The best way to address the primary question was to focus the research methods on the eight secondary questions. Two research methodologies were used to examine the secondary questions: a qualitative survey and a document analysis.

Data Collection Methods

The Use of a Qualitative Survey

The first data collection method used in this study was a qualitative survey. Qualitative research is a type of scientific research that seeks to describe or understand

meaning regarding a subject that is difficult to measure quantitatively.⁸⁸ Qualitative research is used to understand how people make sense of their experiences in the world and is an effective way to gather information on the culture, values, behaviors, and opinions. Qualitative research does not provide tangible, numerical results but instead offers a way to explore and understand human nature through description and processes.⁸⁹

A qualitative research methodology was selected for the purposes of this study because the subject matter—the development of a leadership development program – was not easily quantified. A qualitative approach was conducive to gather ideas and opinions from senior VBA leaders regarding the administration’s current leadership development environment.

Of the many types of qualitative research methods, a survey was deemed to be the most appropriate as it could be administered via email and allowed respondents to answer at their convenience. Additionally, there was no concern that answers might be misheard or misunderstood, as might occur in an interview.

The survey, included as Appendix A, contained six open-ended questions and was included in the body of an electronic mail message. The email correspondence included an introduction from the researcher, a short paragraph regarding the purpose of the research, instructions, and a disclosure regarding informed consent. Participants were

⁸⁸W. Paul Vogt, *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), 183.

⁸⁹Martin Brett Davies, *Doing a Successful Research Project: Using Qualitative or Quantitative Methods* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 9-11.

asked to answer the survey questions and return their responses via email by a specified date.

Survey Questions

To create a manageable product, six open-ended questions related to the primary and secondary questions were identified for inclusion:

1. If VBA were to create a leadership development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.
2. What are the general education and training components that should be included in the program?
3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.
4. How should employees be selected to participate?
5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?
6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

These questions speak to five of the secondary questions by seeking feedback regarding how to focus the desired outcome, suggestions for education and training components to include, suggestions on how to select appropriate employees, and their expectations regarding the amount of support a participant will receive from their supervisor and office. Using senior leaders for their ideas and opinions in these areas is a

good use of their expertise, as they can draw from their experiences within the organization.

Survey Sample

Purposive sampling, or sampling where the researcher conscientiously selects the subjects,⁹⁰ was used. To point, the researcher selected current senior leaders who were identified as potential respondents based on their current position, grade, level of experience within VBA, and anticipated willingness to participate. The sample size was small, with 16 senior leaders from VBA and one from VA; all of the participants were known to the researcher.

Understanding that local culture could play a role in the responses, an effort was also made to target individuals from a geographical variety of VBA offices. To point, the potential respondents reside in ten different states. Six work for VBA's central office, one in an area office, and ten in regional offices. Attention was also focused on the prospective respondents' grade levels and current positions: nine were GS-14, five were GS-15, and three were Senior Executive Service. Four are currently serving as Assistant Veterans Service Center Managers, two as Vocational Rehabilitation Officers, one as an Executive Management Officer, seven as Assistant Directors, and two as Directors.

As mentioned, the respondents were recruited for participation through an initial email correspondence to employees known to the researcher. The email included a synopsis of the research topic and the importance of the responses in helping to shape a recommendation for a leadership development program. The email requested a response

⁹⁰Davies, 57-58.

by a specified date, approximately two weeks later. By the specified date, four responses had been received. Follow up emails were sent to seven from whom a response had not been received, identified as more likely to respond. From this follow up, three additional responses were received. Responses, less names and specific locations of respondents, are included as Appendix B.

The Use of Document Analysis

The second data collection method used in this study is a document analysis, or a summary of the content available in existing material, including print and other formats. A document analysis was conducted on existing leadership development and leader development programs within VBA, other VA offices, and the Army. Reviewing programs within VBA was important to gain understanding of what already existed and where there were gaps. Incorporating other leadership and leader development programs was important to understand programs that were currently working within the VA environment. Incorporating a military organization's program was important, since this study is being conducted within a military academy environment at the Army's Command and General Staff Officers' Course. The Army's Intermediate Level Education Program at this college was identified as an appropriate leadership development program due to the author's personal experience participating in the program. Additionally, this program has a long and successful existence as a leadership and training program for the Army's field grade officers.

All documentation available to the researcher was reviewed on programs within these three organizational environments as a way to survey as well as compare and

contrast: program structure, program format, program methodology, and leadership development program best practices. Specifically, the data collected using this research methodology assisted in addressing four of the secondary questions concerning program structure, preferred methodology, successful formats, and suggestions for curriculums that could be used as models.

Data Analysis Methods

The two data collection methodologies, the qualitative survey and the document analysis of existing programs, address all eight of the secondary questions. The information collected was broken down and analyzed to provide further insight into the development of a leadership development program that meets VBA's desired outcomes, has an effective structure and methodology, incorporates the appropriate education and training components, identifies which employees should have the opportunity to participate through the use of an appropriate participant selection process, identifies at what point in an employee's career the opportunity to participate should be provided, and creating the most successful model to ensure "buy in" and support from participants' supervisors and offices.

For the first methodology, the qualitative survey, the responses were collected and consolidated by organizing the responses according to the secondary questions. The responses were analyzed for input on how to focus the development of the program to ensure that the program meets VBA's needs and expectations. Specifically, the responses were reviewed for suggestions on the main program focuses and outcomes as well as which educational and training components to include. The answers helped with the

process of identifying which employees should be the target population of participants. Finally, the feedback provided by the respondents was analyzed for suggestions on how to gain and maintain support from supervisors and offices as well generally increasing senior leaders' buy-in.

For the second methodology, documents were analyzed for suggestions on program structure, format, methodology, and general education and training components. Each existing program was reduced to its main components, structural suggestions, curriculum ideas, failures, recommendations, and best practices. The best practices and lessons learned from the existing formats and curriculums were applied to the process of developing a recommended leadership program.

An analysis of the data obtained through these methodologies is synthesized in chapter 4. From this analysis, conclusions, recommendations, and areas of future research are discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Overview

As discussed in chapter 3, two methodologies were used to collect data for this research. The first was a document analysis of existing leadership development and leader development programs within VBA, other areas of VA, and the U.S. Army. The second was the collection of responses using a qualitative questionnaire. Following is a discussion of the analysis conducted on the data collected from these two modes of sources.

Document Analysis of Leadership Development Programs

The literature review of existing VBA, VA, and Army leadership/leader development programs focused on answering five of the secondary questions: how to structure the program, what methodology to use, what curriculum components to include, how to identify participants, and what successes and challenges the existing formats and curriculums faced.

For the programs within VA, program descriptions were received from the LDSTF. The initial listing identified 109 programs throughout the agency. Further examination of the 109 programs identified that many of these are not actually programs but single session training opportunities. The initial list of 109 was narrowed to only 30 structured programs. Further review found that despite being classified as leadership development programs, a good portion of these programs are actually training programs. Of the 21 that did contain leadership and leader development aspects, four belong to

VBA. Of these four, three are leader development programs and not leadership development programs. Evidenced by the focus on developing leadership skills and abilities for the individual's growth, these programs did not focus on the greater, networked growth of the organization. The fourth VBA program is mainly a training program but includes limited elements of leadership development. The remaining 17 programs belong to VHA, NCA, or one of the other VA offices. Though no one program provides a perfect model, there are notable components within several of these programs, as detailed below. It should also be noted that at least four of the programs are on indefinite hiatus or had been permanently terminated.

Leadership programs within the Army were reviewed using documentation available online, published resources, and internal curriculum documents. Documentation reviewed included doctrinal documents on Army Leadership and the Army Leadership Development Model, training and informational websites on the Captains Career Course, and a curriculum guide and advance sheets available from the Command and General Staff Officers' Course.

Document Analysis for Secondary Research Question 2 (Program Structure)

At least nine of the VA programs, including three VBA programs, have a long-term focus, spanning at least a year. One program is even defined as a multi-year program (VHA's Clinical Nurse Leader Program). Regardless of the length, all of the programs have a specified timeframe, within which the participant must complete all curriculum elements. Ten of the programs, including four within VBA, are structured around the use of an assigned mentor to help guide the development process.

The Army's programs are structured on three core attributes and competencies, on which all levels of leadership development are based. The Army treats leadership development as a lifelong process, starting as early as college and continuing at intervals through the officer's career. Each developmental opportunity builds on the one preceding it, developing the officer's understanding of the core attributes and competencies from a direct perspective, to organizational and finally strategic perspective. These developmental opportunities span from five to ten months each. Typically, by the time an officer completes CGSOC, they will have completed at least 20 months of leadership development within an instructional environment.

Document Analysis for Secondary Research Question 3 (Methodology)

The document analysis indicated that 13 of the VA programs use a blended methodology. However, the concept of a blended methodology varied from program to program, including components such as resident sessions, online training, workshops and lectures, team projects, assessments, and self-development assignments. Specifically within VBA, the leader development programs utilize a blended methodology combining resident sessions, online learning, group projects, and self-development.

Of the remaining VA programs, two are completely virtual, four use a combination of local instruction and virtual learning, and three use classroom training only. On-the-job training was identified in one VHA program. Four programs, including three VBA programs, identify shadowing opportunities as important for the participants' growth. Two VBA programs also incorporate detail assignments. Six programs, three of

which were VBA, include a group assignment that culminates in a presentation and/or written paper for senior leaders.

Within Army programs, classroom training is prevalent through the use of an instructed Socratic method, seen in both CCC and CGSOC. Additionally, since the Army views leadership as imperative for its Soldiers, the majority of its officers are afforded at least three leadership development opportunities, with some continuing on to a fourth and even fifth opportunity.

Document Analysis for Secondary Research Question 4 (Curriculum)

Two of the programs within VHA utilize a national curriculum that is administered locally. Nine of the programs, including four VBA programs, use a plan to guide participant progress and goals. The plan is either an IDP penned by the participant or a mentoring action plan penned collaboratively by the participant and their mentor. Additionally, five of the VA programs use 360 evaluations as a way for participants to gain greater perspective of their strengths and weaknesses and provide areas of focus and growth.

Although an in-depth analysis of VA curriculums was not possible, common areas of focus for educational and training content include: what makes a leader, trust and integrity, embracing continuous self-improvement, organizational culture, effective oral communication, effective written communication, stress tolerance, emotional intelligence, team building, problem-solving, decision-making, innovation, process development, change management, diversity, interpersonal skills, customer service, responsibility and ownership, and time management.

However, a thorough review of the CGSOC curriculum was possible. The curriculum for this Army program included a leadership track of 22 sessions that spanned almost the entire ten month program. Topics included leading change, organizational culture and climate, managing organizational stress, decision-making, dealing with complexity, effective followership, and moral courage. The impact of ethics and morals within the organizational structure were discussed, and communication skills were emphasized, particularly from a mindset of being empathetic.

Document Analysis for Secondary Research Question 7 (Identifying Participants)

The three VBA leader development programs are all structured similarly but each caters to a specific employee grade range. Eligible employees are carefully selected through an application and interview process. Each program is only offered to a limited number of participants each year, which was the only negative noted for these programs.

At least one other program, an NCA program, also discussed using a competitive process to select candidates, selecting employees who show high potential as defined by their desire to learn, work hard, and move into leadership roles. The remaining programs did not address their selection processes.

Analyzing the Survey Questionnaires

Seven out of seventeen survey questionnaires were received. Responses were reviewed and organized according to content addressing five of the secondary questions. Specifically, the responses addressed suggestions regarding the program's desired outcomes, general education and training components to consider, what point in an

employee's career to consider them for participation, how employees should be identified, and expectations of support from supervisors and offices. Content specific to each question, as provided by respondents, is included as Appendix 2.

Survey Analysis for Secondary Research Question 1 (Outcomes)

The leaders' responses regarding desired outcome and the program's main focus spoke to the need to identify what makes a good leader. Two responses encouraged focusing on characteristics, knowledge, skills, abilities, and traits that leaders will need. Respondent C commented that one size does not fit all when it comes to building a leader and that there are diverse leadership environments within VBA. A good leader needs to be prepared for all of these environments. Respondent D remarked that the skills developed through the program should be transferable to any situation, and not to one specific job or duty.

One respondent took the discussion of developing leaders one step further, discussing the difference between developing leaders and developing managers. Comments from Respondent B included a discussion about VBA's tendency to focus on management skills-such as workload management-instead of leadership skills. Instead, this respondent recommended VBA should focus on the traits, skills, and actions that create leaders. Respondent G commented that the skills to develop leaders should include interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and learning to recognize and adapt communication styles. Respondent B stated that leaders should be developed with skills teaching them how to lead individuals and groups, as well as how to lead across generations.

Respondent E suggested that the program be based on two components. The first component would consist of basic leadership philosophy and skills development, including integrity and ethics, listening skills, project management skills, prioritization techniques, public speaking skills, the concept of leadership by example, and learning how to balance between professional and personal responsibilities. The second component should be based on competencies specific to the organization. In fact, three others (C, D, E) discussed the importance of aligning the program with the administration's key strategic goals, ensuring that the critical skills developed through the program were based on the current and future needs of the organization.

Focusing on the organization's future was another common theme in the responses. Respondent C suggested that the administration needed to look at where they want to be in five, ten, and twenty years from now in order to determine the types of employees, leaders, and culture necessary to sustain forward progress.

Another response suggested that VBA should remind itself of its core mission. Respondent C suggested that time should be taken to explain, remind, and push the meaning of the administration's mission. One final comment by Respondent B recommended that the program focus on ensuring personal accountability and performance.

Survey Analysis for Secondary Research Question 4 (Program Structure)

Two respondents (B, G) encouraged the use of mentors. Respondent G also suggested the use of both a local mentor for easy access and discussion of local issues, as well as a mentor from another office to provide unbiased feedback. Respondent G felt

that mentors should serve long-term and suggested that the mentors be vetted to ensure they possessed proven leadership skills.

Survey Analysis for Secondary Research Question 4 (Curriculum)

In discussing educational and training components, suggestions included effective communication, interpersonal skills, time management skills (Respondent C), customer service (Respondent D), how to deal with employees who do not get along, and ways to raise employee morale (Respondent F). Other comments included the use of a professionally developed and administered curriculum (Respondent B), a de-emphasis on online training, and an emphasis on training in a shared environment to allow for the exchange of ideas as well as the opportunity to incorporate learned concepts (Respondent F). Respondent B suggested one way to develop participants' talents would be to include the opportunity for several details over the course of the program to allow the participants to serve in different leadership positions, use different leadership skills, and learn to adapt to different environments. Respondent G had an even more novel suggestion regarding details, suggesting that participating offices arrange a "detail trade" where two participants would serve in a temporary detail, working at the other's office in a leadership capacity.

Survey Analysis for Secondary Research Question 6 (When to Begin)

Three of the respondents (B, C, G) suggested that the program begin early in an employee's career, with Respondent C even suggesting that participation opportunity begin as early as the beginning of the employee's career. Respondent B, who agreed with

early participation, suggested that the program could be used as a tool to determine suitability for leadership. This respondent felt VBA's current model was to promote someone to a leadership role and then provide them with development. This respondent felt that the leadership development program would be a great way to reverse this trend.

Two other respondents had similar ideas, suggesting a more lifelong learning process that starts in the employee's career and continuing for a defined period of time and a series of developmental opportunities. Respondent C suggested that employees should be weeded out, as the program continued, allowing only those with the most potential to continue to the end.

Respondent G suggested that the opportunity be provided to both participants entering supervisory positions for the first time as well non-supervisory employees interested in a future leadership position. Respondents B and D suggested the program be available to all employees regardless of grade or position. All three suggested using an application process to select appropriate applicants based on their personal interest in leadership, their diversity of experience, and their background.

Survey Analysis for Secondary Research Question 7 (Identifying Participants)

Three respondents (A, B, G) suggested selecting appropriate participants based on the recommendations of current leaders. Respondent B and two others (F, G) took a different approach, encouraging an application process that included previous experiences, personal achievements, demonstrated desire to be a leader within the organization, and motivation to implement change.

Survey Analysis for Secondary Research

Question 8 (Challenges)

Respondent D discussed introducing the program as a way for supervisors and offices to embrace the organization's long-term vision. Four respondents (A, D, E, G) discussed the need to "sell" the program by introducing the benefits that the supervisor and office would receive. Some benefits that were suggested included having the supervisors involved in the selection criteria as a way to ensure the right employees were chosen (D), having the office identify a topic pertinent to local issues for the participant to research (E), and having participants engage in an interoffice detail exchange with another office's participant (G).

Two respondents (B, C) commented that, depending on the supervisor, no amount of "sell" might make him or her completely buy in. Their point of view was that supervisors receive intense pressure to ensure that their subordinates meet production standards. Typically within VBA, even when an employee participates in training or development opportunities, the production standards slotted from that employee for the office (i.e. production per full-time employee) are not reduced. Generally, this means that the slack must be absorbed by other employees. Therefore, they suggested that the best way to encourage an office's support would be to reclassify the participating employee so they do not count against the office's number of full-time employees. Another suggestion to encourage local support, from Respondent F, was to ensure that any funding required for the participant's involvement come from a national source of funding and not from the local office's budget. Two respondents (A, D) discussed an agreement between the office and the participant that would require the participant to stay at the local office for a

certain amount of time following completion or include a pay-back clause if they should leave before the allotted time.

Survey Limitations

As mentioned, seven out of 17 survey responses were received. While the limited number of responses may not fully represent all subcultures within VBA, the respondents that did reply came from geographically varied offices, as well as a variety of GS-14, GS-15, and Senior Executive Services positions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of this research, chapter 5 provides conclusions and recommendations regarding the development of a leader development program within VBA. Additionally, it suggests areas where future research should still be completed.

Conclusions

In keeping with the immortal words of Stephen Covey, who stated “Managers do things right; leaders do the right things,”⁹¹ this chapter draws conclusions regarding the creation of a leadership development program that is most likely to create leaders who do not just possess leader traits but will use their leadership skills to “do the right thing”. The resulting conclusions are based on a document analysis of existing leadership programs as well as the survey responses from senior VBA and VA leaders. Conclusions are addressed by secondary question, as each secondary question addresses a key component in answering the primary question, “Should VBA develop a leadership development program?”

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 1 (Outcomes)

According to the literature, VBA should look at the creation of a leadership development program as an investment not only in its employees, but also in the improvement of the organization’s culture. By creating an environment that promotes and

⁹¹Steven Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 101.

encourages employee development, they are more likely to align their personal development with the organization's goals and values. A learning organization culture ensues, with employees becoming increasingly engaged and committed to the organization.

Tying the literature to VA's guiding "I CARE" philosophy and six all-employee competencies, a leadership development program provides VBA with a tangible opportunity to provide or improve employee's core leadership skills. For example, the outcome would be a program that develops integrity in employees, builds commitment to the organization, and drives employees to desire excellence in their work. The program would achieve these outcomes through a focus on the all-employee competencies by providing employees the opportunity to improve overarching skill sets including written and oral communication, interpersonal effectiveness through empathy and team building, organizational stewardship through an understanding on being customer-focused, and critical thinking through innovative problem-solving and critical-yet-creative thinking processes.

This would also align with the responses received on the surveys, which stressed a focus on leadership skills, not just management skills. Additional comments included making sure that skills were transferrable to any situation or position, applicable across diverse leadership environments, and applied to leading both individuals and groups.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 2 (Program Structure)

Regarding program structure, the literature shows that leadership development initiatives must be systematic and organized endeavors if they are to be successful.

Successful programs will be structured with the organization's strategies and overall culture in mind. The literature was also very clear that including senior leaders with the creation of the structure, and continuing to involve them as a component of the program was important for the program's long-term success.

Based on the document analysis, many programs were structured with a set curriculum and specified timeframe for completion. Multiple programs within VA spanned at least a year, with several lasting longer. The extended timeframe allowed more time for development while allowing the participant flexibility to balance their developmental needs with the needs of their office. The Army programs were all structured as full-time opportunities, progressing over the course of an officer's career. The programs were all structured with three core attributes and three core competencies as their base. This approach provides consistency, ensures continued growth in the six identified areas, and creates a progressive learning environment.

The use of mentors was a common theme in the literature, the document analysis of existing programs, and the survey feedback. Mentoring relationships provide great value to the participant by providing them access to a respected and knowledgeable senior employee from whom they can have candid conversations, seek feedback and guidance, and gain organizational exposure. Without a doubt, mentoring should be included within any leadership development program. Taking mentoring one step further, one program reviewed within the document analysis provided participants the opportunity to interact with situational mentors during a day of rotating roundtable

discussions. In line with these ideas, one of the respondents suggested the use of multiple mentors to ensure the participant has access to unbiased feedback.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 3 (Methodology)

A blended methodology was encouraged by many intellectuals within the leadership development field, used by many of the existing VA programs, and encouraged in the survey responses. Although the definition of a blended methodology varied amongst programs, common components include classroom sessions, independent self-study, online learning, structured on-the-job training, workshops and lectures, shadowing and detail opportunities, and the use of a group project, presentation, and/or research paper.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 4 (Curriculum)

Two VHA programs utilized local administration of a national curriculum. This is a fascinating concept because local administration allows each office to monitor the progress of the participants and be involved with their development, while providing an opportunity for an increased number of employees to participate. At the same time, having a national standard provides an equal experience across all participating employees.

The use of 360-degree evaluations is recommended in multiple literature sources. These assessments are a useful tool for participants to use in their development process, providing them with areas of development opportunity as seen by others in their work

environment. The precedence for the use of 360 evaluations in existing programs already exists, as five VA programs currently use this tool.

Many of the programs reviewed in the document analysis used individual action plans or mentoring action plans as a way for participants to have a visual representation of their progress to help them keep track of their goals. The IDP provides a collaborative opportunity for the participant to work with their mentor in order to identify performance goals. Within the IDP, clearly defined and measurable goals and activities would be associated with specific timeframes and objectives. The mentor would give feedback and motivation to help guide development towards successful completion of the listed items.

Curriculum suggestions in existing leadership development literature ranged in content and suggestions. However, one constant was the concept that the curriculum must align with the organization's strategies and overall culture. Therefore, the pertinent consideration for VBA's program content is to ensure that education and training components support agency and administration goals. For example, the curriculum should focus on skills that would develop capable, efficient, and resilient leaders, leaders who can lead at all levels, formally and informally. Common suggestions from the literature, document analysis, and survey responses included embracing continuous self-improvement, effective oral and written communication, stress tolerance, dealing with pressure, adaptability, emotional intelligence, dealing with conflict, problem-solving, decision-making, how to have a customer service focus, how to influence innovation and embrace change, how to encourage successful team building, responsibility and integrity, time management, presentation and public speaking, and leading by example.

Additionally, the Army programs provided a great source of recommendations for leadership-themed content.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 5 (Existing Format or Curriculum)

Many leadership development program formats and curricula exist, as evidenced by the multiple samples of literature on the topic. However, many of these references emphasized the importance of aligning a program with the goals and culture unique to the organization. Therefore, even existing programs within VA and the Army do not provide a perfect solution. Instead, best practices and lessons learned were pulled from all of these sources in order to recommend a leadership development program that would best fit VBA.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 6 (When to Begin)

Perhaps the most influential model for when to begin an employee's leadership development is to look at the Army's model evidenced in the document analysis. The Army begins leadership development opportunities at the beginning of an officer's career and leadership development continues throughout. The well-known company Johnson & Johnson uses the early-is-better approach with their leadership program: information on the program is included on the intranet site created for newly hired employees.⁹² Providing leadership development opportunities early was also encouraged in the survey responses. While one respondent encouraged providing opportunities as soon as an

⁹²Fulmer and Goldsmith, 132.

employee begins their employment, another encouraged using leadership development as an opportunity to develop leaders prior to their being identified for a management role.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 7 (Identifying Participants)

The Army also provides an influential model for whom to identify for inclusion in leadership development programs; the Army provides these opportunities to almost all of its officers. The Army's embrace of continued learning has established its culture of being a learning organization, something VBA should strive to achieve. Of the existing development programs within VA, four utilize a competitive process for selection: the three programs within VBA all utilize an application process. Survey respondents agreed with the use of an application process for selection and one also suggested utilizing recommendations from current leaders. Survey responses also encouraged that selections be based on the candidate's achievements, experiences, and demonstrated desire to be a leader within the organization.

Conclusions for Secondary Research Question 8 (Challenges)

Although none of the survey respondents spoke to organizational transparency, this was a challenge that was addressed within the literature. Specifically, the literature warned that development opportunities must be clearly communicated.⁹³ Clear communication about leadership development programs provides more employees with

⁹³Fulmer and Goldsmith, 49.

the opportunity to participate, promotes diversity within the programs, and encourages an organizational learning culture.

It has been said that nothing is more crucial than cultivating future leaders,⁹⁴ yet achieving support for employee development programs can be challenging. For example, some supervisors might not be able to look past the short-term loss of productivity.

Others might be concerned with the financial constraints associated with administering a program. Although several respondents spoke to the importance of “selling” the program to direct supervisors, at least two still expressed concerns that support would be an issue.

The literature discusses a myriad of issues that can sideline or destroy a leadership development program. One suggestion to counter negativity and garner support is to “capitalize on quick wins and communicate successes throughout the organization”⁹⁵.

Senior leaders are more likely to support leadership development efforts that are getting results. The literature on effective leadership development programs also shows that the programs that produce the best leaders are those in which senior executives are actively involved. Indeed, the tone and quality of the programs are often anchored in the amount of support received from senior leaders. One easy method to ensure support from these leaders is to incorporate their participation in the program as mentors, facilitators, presenters, or in some other capacity.

Another challenge suggested in survey responses was the impact of employee participation on an office’s productivity. Respondents encouraged finding ways to reduce

⁹⁴Kets De Vries and Korotov, 9.

⁹⁵Fulmer and Goldsmith, 23.

the impact or counterbalancing the impact with other perks. For example, two recommended reclassifying participants so that they would not count against the office's full-time employee production requirements. Another suggested a requirement that all program participants be required to remain an employee of their office for a designated timeframe following completion of the program. Others recommended providing a benefit to the office, such as utilizing program participants to research and present solutions on a local issue.

Primary Research Question: Should VBA Develop
a Leadership Development Program?

The need for a leadership development program within VA was established by the findings of the LDSTF. These findings were reinforced for VBA through a review of VBA's current leadership development infrastructure and survey responses from various VBA and VA senior leaders. However, if this evidence is still not enough to demonstrate the existing need, employee satisfaction numbers should provide any final clarification. According to the *2013 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*, VBA ranked 214 out of 300.⁹⁶ In the measure of training and development, which gauged employees' beliefs that their agency was appropriately assessing, addressing, and providing training and developmental opportunities, VBA ranked 223 out of 299.⁹⁷ Finally, in the measure

⁹⁶The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2013 Rankings, "Agency Index Scores, Mid-size Agencies," <http://bestplacetowork.org/BPTW/rankings/overall> (accessed April 13, 2014).

⁹⁷The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2013 Rankings, "Training and Development, Agency Subcomponents," <http://bestplacetowork.org/BPTW/rankings/demographics/sub/trainingdevelopment> (accessed April 13, 2014).

of effective leadership, a measure of not only how much employees believe that their leadership motivates and manages fairly, but also how much their leadership promotes professional development and empowerment of employees, VBA ranked 263 out of 299.⁹⁸

Based on these points of evidence, VBA should strongly consider developing a leadership development program as a method of intensifying employee development opportunities. “Developing a leader is not a luxury. Leadership development is a strategic necessity.”⁹⁹ VBA must view leadership development as a necessity—a way to proactively improve the environment its employees work in by providing them with a tool to reshape the organizational culture. Investing in such a program would help employees feel valued, while simultaneously providing them an opportunity for professional growth. A leadership development program would provide employee leadership skills, such as emotional intelligence, leading by example, and enhanced communication methods. Organizational gains would be more effective and efficient employees, improved employee morale, the establishment of a learning organization culture, and the development of future potential leaders.

⁹⁸The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2013 Rankings, “Effective Leadership, Agency Subcomponents,” <http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/rankings/demographics/sub/leadership> (accessed April 13, 2014).

⁹⁹Fulmer and Goldsmith, 3.

Recommendations

This study recommends that VBA develop a leadership development program, thus investing in a program that will provide participants with new, overarching leadership skills while also enhancing their current skills.

Recommendations for Program Structure and Methodology

Based upon this research, a suggested model for the leadership program is one structured as a multi-year program that progresses in intensity, commitment, and cost over time. The program would have a set timeframe, with specified milestones achieved through the use of a blended methodology. The methodology would start with individualized components (self-study, online learning, and an individual research project), gradually advancing to more intensive components (structured on-the-job training, classroom sessions, and a group project), and ending with experiential components (shadowing opportunities and the completion of a detail assignment).

The program should be centered on several mentoring relationships: a local mentor, a national mentor, and situational mentors. Local mentors would meet with the participant for regularly scheduled, perhaps monthly, one-on-one sessions. The local mentor would help shape the IDP, work with local office leaders to align the participant's goals with opportunities in the office, align the participant's goals with organizational goals, and provide counseling and feedback. A national mentor would be a senior leader assigned to several participants who are not employees at their local office. Participants would meet with their national mentors semi-regularly, perhaps quarterly. Both local and national mentors would be able to expose participants to people and processes that they

would not be able to access on their own. National mentors provide exposure to greater reach within the network. Both local and national mentors enable greater levels of growth than a participant would be able to achieve on their own. The national mentor would also provide the participant with a different perspective and leadership style from their local mentor.

Similar to the concept of “brown bag lunches” seen in other VA leadership programs, the third aspect of mentoring would be a situational mentor; a senior-level VA leader leading a live conversation on a specified leadership topic on which they hold expertise. Situational mentoring conference calls would be held monthly, with a rotating list of topics and leaders. The participant would be required to attend a number of these through the year but would be able to choose which ones based on their development goals, personal interests, workload, and work schedule.

Recommendations for Program Outcomes

This study recommends that the program outcomes include developing integrity-driven employees, encouraging employees to think outside the box through innovation and creativity, promoting resiliency in the face of adversity and pressure, supporting effective and efficient decision-making processes, and leading employees to a sense of ownership and responsibility. These outcomes would align with VBA’s strategic goals.

Recommendations for Program Curriculum

It is recommended that the program be based on a national curriculum that is designed to ensure consistency, but that is administered locally in order to provide more opportunities for participation. Local administration would also create a local context for

the program, involving participant's supervisors and senior leaders with facilitation of activities and experiences pertinent to local goals and initiatives in conjunction with national priorities.

One recommendation is that VBA's leadership development program use a phased structure that begins with basics that emphasize VA's core characteristics and competencies, similar to the concept used by the Army. The skills developed at the beginning of the program will be continuously reinforced and refined by succeeding projects, classroom sessions, and other learning opportunities.

The curriculum must focus on overarching skill sets that enhance success in current positions as well as holding value for future positions of leadership. The curriculum should include a combination of required and selective assignments, which will allow each participant to mold the program according to their professional aspirations. The curriculum should allow some leniency in completion of activities, but certain milestones must be achieved within set timeframes in order to continue to the next phase. This not only assures participant progression but also accountability. Content suggestions include, but are not limited to: effective oral and written communication, innovative problem-solving, trust and integrity, resiliency and adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership and followership styles, influence skills, the value of interpersonal skills in conflict management, how to have a customer service focus, time management, and presentation and public speaking skills.

Participants should utilize two valuable tools during the initial phase of the program: a 360-degree evaluation and an IDP. Participants will use feedback attained

from their 360-evaluation as one source of identifying their professional goals. With help from their mentor, participants will use the IDP to frame goals in a manner that is realistic, measurable, and attainable. Participants will monitor their progress on their IDP, marking completed goals and modifying or adding new goals based on developing interests. At the end of the program, the participant will complete a second 360-evaluation, reinforcing their progress and identifying areas for continued growth. They will make additional revisions to the IDP that will ensure continued momentum in their professional development following termination of the program.

Another recommended aspect of the curriculum is a research assignment pertinent to the local office. As part of the participant's self-study, they will begin gathering information on their assigned topic in order to write a research paper, which will be presented to local leaders. Later in the program, participants will participate in a group project based on current national VBA projects and initiatives. The team will complete a research paper and present their findings to national leaders. These two opportunities will provide participants with occasions to learn about organizational issues, interact with senior leaders and other employees, improve writing and presentation skills, and have participation in a team setting. Additionally, senior leaders are provided new perspectives on existing issues.

Two recommended elements discussed in the methodology include a shadowing opportunity and a detail assignment. A shadowing experience provides participants the opportunity to spend a week in the life of a senior executive. While shadowing, the participant attends meetings, listens to scheduled conference calls, and has the

opportunity to discuss the office's current challenges with the leader. A detail is a long-term assignment of a month or longer where the participant is actually placed in a leadership role. The participant will make day-to-day decisions and handle all responsibilities associated with that duty. As suggested by a survey respondent, another recommendation is that either or both of these opportunities occur at a different office, and should be coordinated as an exchange between two offices with participating employees.

Recommendations for When and How to Select Participants

It is best that the program be available to employees early in their careers and that selection be based on self-identification. In order to participate, employees must sign an agreement with verbiage stating they have a desire to be a continuous learner, will work hard, and want to move towards future positions of leadership or responsibility. They will agree to work towards specified program milestones and understand that an expectation exists that some of the program's work will occur during personal time and outside of the work environment. Additionally, participants must affirm understanding that their participation is dependent on meeting productivity standards throughout the program. Supervisors should be aware of the employee's participation, but should not be able to block participation unless the employee does not meet the basic standards.

As the program methodology intensifies over time, so would the commitment expected from participants. As each phase of the program ends, participants will be asked to determine their motivation to continue. Those not dedicated to continuing will terminate their involvement. Even without full completion of the program, these

employees will have gained skills and knowledge that increase their effectiveness and organizational understanding. Dedicated participants will continue on, receiving increasingly challenging and advanced professional development opportunities.

Recommendations for Dealing with Program Challenges

It is necessary that VBA ensure that its leadership, beginning with the highest levels of management, support and promote the program. Support from these leaders should include, but not be limited to, input in curriculum topics and participation in the program as local or situational mentors. Involvement by senior leaders would keep the program relevant and ensure its long-term success. Additionally, VBA must be dedicated to communicating the program's existence to all levels of employees, ensuring transparency and equal opportunities for participation.

Final Recommendations

Through the creation of a leadership development program, as suggested above, VBA would be able to develop its own future leaders. The administration would work towards building and sustaining a high quality workforce while benefiting the long-term success of both the employees and the organization. According to Lao Tzu, "When the best leader's work is done, the people say, 'We did it ourselves.'"¹⁰⁰ The creation of a leadership development program within VBA would give the "VBA people" the opportunity to say, "We did it."

¹⁰⁰Lao Tzu, quoted in Gordon S. Jackson, *Never Scratch a Tiger with a Short Stick* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003), 105.

Further Research

Based on the findings of this research and the suggestions made, areas of future study pertain to how VBA should approach actually developing a leadership development program. This would include curriculum development, costs, and funding. Once a program exists, future research should focus on ways to encourage mid-level and senior-levels managers to endorse and promote the program.

Additionally, this study looked specifically at the development of a leadership development program with recommendations specific to the unique culture within VBA, which is only one portion of VA. While there is only one “VA”, each administration and staff office has its own culture - this is one of the biggest internal challenges that VA faces. Future research should look at the possibility of bridging leadership development programs and best practices across the VA organizational structure in order to make the most of the agency’s available resources.

APPENDIX A

Email with Survey Questions and Redacted Survey Responses

Greetings from Fort Leavenworth!

You may (or may not) be aware that I am currently TDY to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, completing an assignment to the Army Command and General Staff Officers' Course as an interagency student. As part of this ten-month program, I am completing a Masters in Military Art and Science. To this end, I am hoping to seek your assistance.

For my Masters Thesis, I am researching leader development programs within VA and specifically within VBA. I am recommending that VBA considers developing a program to provide overarching leader development skills to a wide range of employees. This developmental opportunity would not only provide additional skill sets to the employees, but also create a stronger candidate pool for VBA's future succession planning needs.

The expertise and thoughts of senior level supervisors and managers, such as yourself, is a very important part of my process. It will allow me to gather information regarding the appropriateness, acceptability, and structure of my recommendation. Therefore, I would be honored if you would participate by reviewing and responding to the following six questions. If are willing to assist and could send your responses to me by Friday, April 4, it would be greatly appreciated. If you are willing to assist but need more time, please let me know.

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.
2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.
3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.
4. How should employees be selected to participate?
5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?
6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

Additionally, please note that below my signature block is required verbiage regarding consent. Any email response received for these questions will be considered as implied consent, unless you state otherwise.

Thank you in advance for sharing your time and expertise. If you have any questions about my research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Shireen Lackey
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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Shireen.Lackey@va.gov

Please note: Below is verbiage regarding research consent, which is required by the college.

To: Director, Graduate Degree Programs
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Lewis & Clark Center, Room 4508

Consent and Use Agreement: Participation in this research is voluntary. I have the right to choose to participate in this research and to quit participation at any time without penalty. The anticipated risk to in participating is negligible and no direct personal benefit has been offered for my participation. If I have questions about this research study, I understand that I can contact the student at Shireen.N.Lackey.CIV@mail.mil or Dr. Robert F. Baumann, Director of Graduate Degree Programs, at (913) 684-2742.

1. By providing this email response, I acknowledge that my responses to the questions posed by Shireen Lackey, a graduate student in the Master of Military Art and Science Degree Program, are considered research concerning the following topic:
How can VBA develop an effective leader development program?
2. I understand that, if applicable, any recordings and any transcript resulting from an interview as part of this research will be secured and maintained for a required three year period. An electronic scan of signed consent forms will be maintained separately with the CGSC research application. Original consent forms are shredded.
3. I hereby expressly and voluntarily relinquish all rights and interests in the transcript recording, if applicable.
OR I consent with the following caveat: _____

4. By providing this email response, I consent that I understand my participation is voluntary and I may stop participating at any time without explanation or penalty. I understand that, if applicable, the tapes and transcripts resulting from this oral history may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore, may be releasable to the public contrary to my wishes. I further understand that, within the limits of the law, the U.S. Army will attempt to honor the restrictions I have requested to be placed on these materials. My email response and the date of the email response provide my consent.

APPENDIX B

Survey Responses

Respondent A: GS-14, VBA Central Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.
Leadership (What is it?, What makes a good leader?, What characteristics should a leader display)
2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.
Training on HR, training on delegation, training on dealing with upper management
3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.
GS 14s and 15s chiefs and Ads
4. How should employees be selected to participate?
By their position and recommendation by leadership
5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?
Full support
6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?
That the participant would be required to continue to serve in their office for 18 – 24 months after completion.

Respondent B: GS-15, VBA Regional Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.

The main focus of the program should be on leadership principles and practices. Too often, VBA focuses on basic workload management not true leadership skills. Today's generation of workers are much different from even the previous generation, knowing how to lead across generations is critical. The focus must be on leading individuals and groups, not one or the other. The outcomes should be on the traits, skills, and actions that create leaders, not managers. There is a considerable difference between leaders and managers – we have too many managers and not enough true leaders. The focus must be on ensuring personal accountability and performance before being placed in a leadership position. We must look across industries to find best practices and traits that successful companies use.

2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.

I am not sure there is a script you can follow for a terrific program. I believe some classroom training would be beneficial for all, except the training should be professionally developed and delivered. For example, we cannot simply put people through the ADDP program and expect them to become leaders at that level. There are companies that specialize in this material and have had proven success, we should look to them. Mentoring is a critical component as well. Every individual in this program should be paired with a mentor who they can shadow and have as a long-term mentor, not just for a few months during the program. The mentors must be carefully vetted and only be individuals with proven leadership skills. Somehow we must remove politics from this. A leadership coach is also a terrific tool for a true leadership program. A successful leadership coach can instill accountability and provide unbiased feedback.

3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.

The program should focus on an individual level. We must begin to develop our leaders early in their career instead of once they enter a leadership position. The program should be another tool used to determine if the employee is suitable for a leadership position. As of now, we promote people then provide training, we need to reverse that. Most people who become excellent leaders can be identified early. There are generally natural talents true leaders have, these talents have to be recognized by current leaders. There is no one way the program should focus on, it must be based on the individual who has been identified and shown interest in becoming a leader.

4. How should employees be selected to participate?

Current, successful leaders should identify and recommend employees to participate. Any employee could apply; however, we must have people who have proven their leadership abilities select the candidates. Part will be based on previous experience and outcomes, but most must be based on demonstrated desire and abilities to become an excellent leader. Personal achievements, morals, and track record must be impeccable. VBA has chosen people for leadership positions with a questions history, people will not follow that leader.

5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?

I think for the most part, employees will not receive considerable support in the current environment. We are focused on the outcome of production goals, not developing people. When we do send people to development opportunities, when they return it is back in the daily grind, not continuing the development or even assessing the development. We must change the culture of leadership development before it will become a true success. We say one thing about leadership development; however, our actions are difference.

6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

To make this successful, I think we need to ensure only the 'right' people are selected for these programs. We have many programs now that are check marks instead of true development. Ideas to improve and make it more palatable would be to actually remove the employee from the office and the FTE of the office. This way, it would should a true commitment to the leadership program and the office would not be hurt by losing the employee's production or work during the program. If offices could hire behind the individual it would help. Additionally, if the leadership program was several years, the employee could do details at different sites, in different leadership positions, with different skills around them, further developing their talents.

Respondent C: GS-15, VBA Area Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.

If VBA were to create a leader development program, outside of the multiple programs already in existence, I believe the agency should first focus on the knowledge, skills, abilities as well as specific traits/types of leaders they need in the various environments throughout the agency. I understand a one size fits all doesn't always work – especially in an agency with 56 different cultures spread across the country as well as a dozen more in VBACO. If the agency took time to look at where and what they wanted to be in 5, 10 and 20+ years and also took the time to focus on what kind of employees, leaders, culture the agency should start employing, training and recruiting I think we could start working toward that and be in a better place tomorrow. However, we often fail in that arena because we quickly throw out the agency set agendas and only focus on that and don't put much meaning/background behind it and rarely follow through. Also, when they are not set from above – we seem to simply revert back to we serve Veterans and that's the best mission in the country if not the world. To be honest, if I were not a Veteran myself I don't think I would understand what that means and would never understand because nobody really takes time to explain, remind and consistently push the meaning/mission and why it's important. Furthermore, many Veterans don't understand it – we serve with people that to be honest are not the best of people with the best characters and those that never followed or believed in the mission or took pride in the military when they served. Other Veterans have a sour taste as well when they know how DoD works and what character of services other than honorable are being served now in the VA when those individuals didn't even take the pride in serving which is displayed on their paperwork. That is simply my point of view and not necessarily that of the agency. From the agency standpoint I simply think we should work toward answering those very easy questions we learn as a nation at some point in our lives – who, what, where, why and how. Who are we, what do we do or what do we want to do, where are we and where are we going, why are we doing this (to include communicating and instilling the explanation across the agency with enough specific other than just we serve Veterans because they served us) and how are we going to get there (specific enough to ensure everyone know what we need to do – step by step) to include how we are going to sustain (the sustainment piece is rarely there). Now assuming that we know who, what, where, why and how – I'll answer your question and say the focus should be on communicating, motivating, implementing and sustaining. These four things will hopefully have an outcome of helping ensure we don't duplicate efforts, gain abilities to articulate the who, what, where, why and how, get folks to move on their own instead of push them to where we think they should be and the most important, make it so we don't lose focus, we follow through and we work toward whatever it is we decided not only today but tomorrow as well.

2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program?

Please explain why.

Effective communication – to ensure what we say is actually being received with the information we think we are communicating.

Interpersonal skills – to help move toward pulling others vs. pushing them.

Time management – this is a big one with me – In my personal opinion we don't appreciate time or at least don't give it the appreciation it deserves. Too many times are there 20+ individuals sitting on a call waiting for 20-30 minutes before it begins because the leader of the meeting didn't appreciate the time of those individuals. Too many times we talk and talk without moving toward a solution, resolution or simply actions needed to get something moving and instead we meet, then setup another meeting and so on. Time management training I hope would get people thinking and appreciating their own as well as others time.

3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?)

Please explain why.

Focus should start on the individuals the day they begin employment with our agency. When you wait 5, 10, 15 years before you focus on an individual you've already lost – these individuals already have a set way and whether that is good or bad, it may not meet the need of the agency or worse go against what we are working toward.

4. How should employees be selected to participate?

This is a hard one. If my employee focus was selected and we actually started developing the first day of employment I would say it should be a series of events/training and the best move on throughout the lifespan. Meaning all are included and participate in the phase 1 of the leadership program, then those who show the most potential (based on an agency –wide agreed set of standards) move to phase two ... then phase three and so on. We frequently select the best claims processors but I whole heartedly disagree with that approach because being the best claims processor doesn't mean you'll even be a mediocre manager/supervisor/leader.

5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?

If we start today – I don't think the first line supervisor should be involved or at least shouldn't be a deciding factor. This simply for the reason their first line supervisor may or may not be a good leader themselves and may not have the best interest because their focus is simply processing more claims today than they did the day before. If they are involved and are focused on this they will lean one of two ways: 1. Support those who are the best at claims processing because that is what our day-to-day is or 2. Support those who are not the best at claims processing because they don't want to lose their best because again, that's our day-to-day.

6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

With the existing force I'm not sure. You'll not have complete buy-in from all the supervisors regardless of how creative or how incentivized you make it for them. I don't think you'll have much push back on phase one of the leadership program (assuming that would ever be implemented) because these folks wouldn't be going, and haven't historically gone, against their bottom-line. For those selected to move forward onto other phases of the program I would simply remove/reclassify them from being counted against the bottom line. Meaning, they still work production but they are not counted as a claims processor for the station – assuming we are talking only about claims processors (insurance, comp, pension, loan guaranty,... not sure about VRE).

Note – the above is my personal opinions and not necessarily that of the Department of Veterans Affairs or others employed by the agency.

Respondent D: GS-15, VBA Central Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.

Leadership development should be aligned with the current and future needs of the organization as well as focus on critical skill sets that are missing within the organization. Thus, I would like to see a more pronounced focus on planning for innovation, project management, analytics, and continuous improvement. Not only do these four components directly align with key strategic goals, but they are transferable to nearly any situation. As VBA becomes a larger, more enterprise-focused organization, these are critical skill sets not traditionally taught and/or learned at the lower ranks of VSR, RVSR, and in some cases entry-level management. Outcomes should be tailored across the four components and be aligned with filling gaps at VBA. For example, innovation outcomes should focus on developing creative and critical thinking skills, ability to incorporate mutual models, ability to capture new and aggressive business requirements, and a focus on solution development (versus problem solving). PM should focus on key positions across VBA and having individuals obtain PMP certification in order to lead projects and project groups. Analytics is sorely needed specifically to develop a cadre of individuals with solid math and statistical backgrounds. Again, as VBA becomes larger and more enterprise-like organization, the ability to make data-driven decisions and move beyond analysis is key. Our data will continue to become not only more robust, but also more prevalent and complex. We need to seriously invest in home grown talent to embrace solutions devised from a data standpoint. Lastly, an outcome-based continuous improvement program would align with industry best practices in such programs akin to customer-service, case-flow, and outreach organizations. What methodologies and case studies best align with VBA should be studied and applied using a practicum focus curriculum.

2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.

Would suggest a three-stage blended approach

- a) University trained graduate certificate programs to focus on academic structure/learning
- b) VBA focused group/individual blended learning workshops to align academic learning to VBA issues
- c) Solution design, solicit needs from senior VBA leadership for individuals and groups to directly apply newly learned skills to address a VBA need

3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.

Employee potential and agency needs. Focus should be on the outcome (1-4 focus groups) and employees of all positions and grade levels should be targeted. Applications should be based upon individual interest, while selection criteria should embrace diversity of experience and background and heavily weighted for employee potential to be a successful fit for specific training.

4. How should employees be selected to participate?
(Above)

5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?
Mixed. Need organization to embrace long-term vision and how this would potentially impact immediate organizational needs in terms of being available

6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?
Supervisors should have immediate impact to selection criteria and project selections. Also, need pay-back period.

Respondent E: Senior Executive Service, VA Central Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.

I believe any leadership development program – regardless of the organization or its mission(s) – has essentially two main components. The first component is basic leadership philosophy and skills development. In other words, there are certain characteristics and attributes all good leaders possess and I believe all of them can be discussed in detail and to a large degree taught. These would include but are not limited to integrity, loyalty, listening skills, inter-personal communication skills, treating everyone with dignity and respect, time management skills, the importance of delegating, project management, prioritization techniques, public speaking, ethics, concept of leadership by example, importance of balance (work and off-duty), etc. Those (and many others) are enduring competencies that are directly related to how effective a leader can be within their organization. The second component is more aligned with the respective organization's core missions. This aspect would entail particular competencies expected of a leader within an organization. Worded differently, it's difficult to be respected as a leader in an organization if the people who are working for you do not respect your professional competence – even if a person possesses all of the other more “generic” leadership skills and competencies I described earlier.

2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.

In a similar way that I just laid out in my response to your initial question, I believe all education and training components should balance the need to teach and instill as many of the fundamental leadership competencies as possible with the necessity to teach very specific competencies related to the organization's mission. These programs should also be tailored to the level of leadership responsibility a person has within the organization. For example, you are currently attending U.S. Army Command and General Staff College – a course perfectly suited for the student population there, which as you now know primarily consists of O3 and O4s from the different military services of the U.S. military and many of our allied nations. However, the curriculum taught at your current course at Fort Leavenworth would not be appropriate for a group of newly commissioned military officers. It is too advanced a course for that population, which is still taking entry-level training programs and learning the fundamentals. That is what I mean by the education and training components have to be “tailored” to the student population and the needs of the organization. In other words, if you think back to high school, it did not make any sense to teach 9th grade students calculus or trigonometry until such time as they demonstrated they had mastered algebra and geometry. The training should be matched with the intended audience's experience and existing skill level.

3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.

In the context of your question, I'm not sure I understand the distinction between "employee level" and "grade." Having said that, and to reinforce what I've said in my previous two responses, I believe factoring in a combination of level/grade and specific position is appropriate. From a practicality standpoint, it's very difficult if not impossible in large organizations to focus training on specific positions. More often than not, "generic training" tends to be more geared towards a particular grade level and "specific training" tends to be more linked to a particular position or a sub-grouping of people with similar education backgrounds and positions – such as a room full of doctors. I don't see this as an "either-or proposition." I think it's more of a combination of both. In other words, VA could choose to have a training class for all SES personnel, and that type of training would presumably be effective because everyone present is within the same basic population and have similar education backgrounds, leadership experience, work ethos, prominence within their organizations, shared responsibilities common to all SES positions, etc. But the viability of any training for that same population would erode quickly if VA tried to teach specific tasks that most people attending the training had no prior experience in.

4. How should employees be selected to participate?

I believe the selection of employees for leadership training should balance three key factors: 1) needs of the individual; 2) needs of the organization, and 3) the long-term potential of the employee(s) / student(s). Of the three, the last one is the most-important to me.

5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?

I don't know exactly what you are trying to get at with this question. Fundamentally, when an employee is in a long-term training program, they are far-removed from their parent organization, in most instances both figuratively and literally. Based on my experience, the parent organization should not be expected to provide much support for their people attending training nor should those attending training expect much from their supervisors. I recognize there are other models that could be used in which the employee attending training could receive greater support from their supervisor and/or their parent organization, but I would not favor those models. I think one of the great things of long-term training programs is they afford an employee an opportunity to "disengage" from their parent organization and supervisor and get into the academic setting free of the normal organizational biases and constraints, which allows the employer/student to "think outside of the box" in ways that would not be possible back in the routine work environment. From my perspective, the main connectivity the employee should have with their supervisor is to mutually discuss and develop some topic ideas for the type of project or "White Paper" the employee could work on while attending the long-term training program; ideally that discussion would occur before the employee left to attend the training.

6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

I really don't have a strong opinion on this one way or another. I think the two major concerns supervisors typically have when one of their employees is gone for a long-term training program are: 1) Who will cover their workload during the extended absence, and 2) What benefit(s) will the organization accrue (in the short and long-term) from an employee attending long-term training? Generally speaking, if supervisors and more senior-ranking leaders in an organization believe that both of those concerns have been addressed to their satisfaction, they generally do not object when members of their staff are gone for extended periods to attend training.

Respondent F: GS-14, VBA Regional Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.

Establishing and maintaining trust between managers and 1st line supervisors, maintaining work environments with high morale. The outcome should be a work environment that is both statistically (high retention) and experientially (high marks for morale on employee surveys) a great place to work. The reason is because it is my belief that low morale and a lack of trust between employees and managers is VBA's biggest challenge in realizing the full employee productivity potential. Morale remains low, managers are typically not trusted; transparency and investment in outcomes by employees is low.

2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.

Nothing has killed the effectiveness of training more than the move to more and more online training. We need to largely de-emphasize on line training except when it is refresher such as ethics or privacy. Training focused on changing the culture of an organization cannot be online.

I think managers need a conceptual framework for addressing the messiness of management: employees who can't get along, morale issues, addressing HR issues in ways that respect and protect employees, getting buy-in on priorities, and so on. I think this framework needs to come from a tried and tested environment that empowers employees and has a track record for productivity/high retention. And it needs to be face to face, with the money invested in travel and setup costs to bring in actual people who can relate real ideas effectively. If the media will be on-line, then I don't recommend moving forward.

3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.

It could be both. Position specific training is especially valuable for unique challenges, but broader culture focused training could be provided at a grade level to a number of employees of same/similar grade (like LEAD).

4. How should employees be selected to participate?

Application process with an opportunity to demonstrate writing skills and a vision for making positive changes. People who have demonstrated excellence in past employment (perhaps at the line worker level) and are likely to apply that level of motivation to implementing change in a leadership position.

5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?

It really depends on the manager. Some managers really support and actively recruit employees for leadership development ops. Others have little focus on it.

6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

If the travel away from station was a maximum of 1 to 2 weeks (per session or module) and that funding of course would be national, not at the RO level. If you want my employees to sit in front of a computer for a week doing online training, you will lose my vote right away. I've participated in training for over 10 years now as a VBA employee. The best training was always at a location where everyone was brought together and could exchange ideas while integrating the new learning concepts. Online training guts those opportunities.

Respondent G: GS-14, VBA Regional Office

1. If VBA were to create a leader development program, what should be the main focus of the program? What outcomes should the program be focused on attaining? Please explain why.

Interpersonal skills should be the primary focus, with emphases on emotional intelligence, recognizing and adapting communication styles, and mentoring others. We'd want to develop leaders who are sensitive to others' feelings and needs, but who aren't pushovers.

It's often said that people don't leave jobs; they leave supervisors. That certainly holds true in VBA. If we have more emotionally intelligent leaders, we will be less likely to lose our most-talented employees to other agencies.

2. What educational and/or training components should be included in the program? Please explain why.

I highly recommend the implementation of a mentorship element. If at all possible, each participant should have at least two mentors: one at their own station, and one at a different station. This will allow them to discuss local policies as well as more sensitive issues that they would not want to discuss with someone in their own office. In addition, the local mentor would be easily accessible to the participant.

3. Which of the following should the program focus on: a specific employee level, a specific grade, or a specific position? (Or a different categorization all together?) Please explain why.

I'm not sure if these should be lumped together, or be two separate classes, but I would think that it should focus both on newly-promoted supervisors and on non-supervisory employees who are interested in leadership positions.

4. How should employees be selected to participate?

For newly-promoted supervisors, the selection process would be obvious. For those who would like to move into leadership positions, it should be based partly on supervisory observation and recommendation, and partly on written and verbal applications.

5. What type of support are employees likely to receive from their supervisors?

Honestly, it depends on the supervisor! In my experience, those who have participated in leadership programs are more likely to be supportive.

6. What would make participation in the program more palatable for the supervisors/offices of the participating employees?

Request supervisory input, as far as what they think the participants would particularly benefit from. Also, if non-supervisory employees are given assignments as "assistants" to their immediate supervisors during the program, that may help encourage support. If any sort of intra-office detail is done as part of the program, detail "trading" should be encouraged – that way, each office stands to gain from participation.

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